The Premier Magazine of Gaming News, Advance Previews and Accurate Reviews

INTELLIGENT GAMER ™

SUPER MARIO 64 ILLUSTRATION BY PETER BOLLINGER
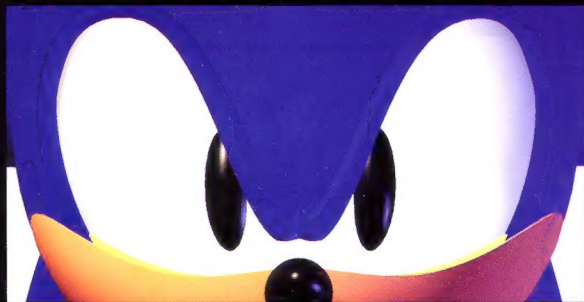
THE CHANGING FACE OF GAMING

TEKKEN 2
Namco Takes PlayStation Fighters To the Next Level

SONIC X-TREME
Sega's Signature Character Delivers 32-Bit Upgrade

SUPER MARIO 64
Will the N64 Launch With the Best Action Game Ever?

EXCLUSIVE PREVIEWS:
ESOTERIA 3 · TRIPLE PLAY 97
G-NOME: DOMINION · NIGHTS
NHL POWERPLAY '96 · SPIDER
MINDWARP · PROJECT OVERKILL
REVELATIONS: DEVIL SUMMONER
ADIDAS POWER SOCCER
NBA ACTION '96 · TOBAL NO. 1

PLUS A COMPLETE 32-BIT RELEASE SCHEDULE INSIDE

E3 SPECIAL REPORT:
THE SHAPE OF GAMES TO COME
begins page 26

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DECKER PUBLICATIONS

Nintendo⁶⁴ · Saturn · PlayStation · M2 · Arcade · PC · Internet

You can't just run away from your problems any more. From now on, you'll have to think on your feet.

Jumping, ducking and dodging have always been a critical part of any button-bashing Mario adventure. But with the new Super Mario RPG you'll also be pushing every brain cell you've got. • That's right. You and the world's most heroic plumber will have to battle through all the twists, turns and thumb-numbing action of a classic Mario adventure. Plus, meet the mental challenge as the story unfolds in this fully-rendered role-playing game! • It's the best of both worlds. One minute you're neck and neck at the Yoshi Races. The next you're gambling the night away at the Grate Guy's Casino. And, in between, you'll have to test your brains on mind-mushing riddles and new action-puzzles. Of course you'll find plenty of new friends who can help out. But they'll need your help

You'd never want to be on the bad side of your new pal Mallow. His thunderbolt Special Attack brings a blast of lightning down on any enemies in sight.

You want a new kind of Mario action? Try the Yoshi races. But here's a tip. If you don't hit the buttons to the beat, you'll get beat.

Finding Frogfucious is a wise move if you want to know more about your future quest.

in return. Without you, Mallow will never find his true family. Geno will never become a real boy. And Booster will never find a bride. • You'll also bump into all kinds of new bad-dies, plus classic goons from every Mario game in history. Only now, they're rendered in ACM with a 3-D, three-quarter overhead view. • So get ready for all kinds of new Nintendo action and brain-bending Square Soft adventure. Remember, running and jumping is a great start. But this time around you'll also need plenty of brains to finish.
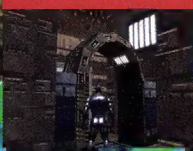
Whether you call it more action or more RPG, the fact is you'll have to use every trick in both books to beat these bad guys.

FEATURES

THE E³ BUZZ

EDITORIAL

Y·O·G·E

E³: It's our cover story and main focus for this issue, and there's no doubt in my mind that everybody will be talking about the show for months, if not years, to come. Rather than boring you, I'm going to virtually ignore E³ for the rest of this editorial and talk about something which is perhaps even more important to the industry than a huge public showing of this year's products—the chances for continued shows, particularly international ones, in the future.

The operative word here is "Yoge" (pronounced yoh-gay), which is Japanese for "foreign (or Western) game." As you'll read in this issue's Japan Today column, Sony Computer Entertainment in Japan has taken it upon themselves to heavily promote yôgé software from North American and European developers, including the now famous Wipeout and Destruction Derby, within the challenging Japanese gaming marketplace. As you may or may not realize, while U.S. and European gamers are eating up Japanese software—and some U.S. gamers (thankfully) even get sickened when companies package Japanese games in poor U.S. box art—the Japanese marketplace hasn't been overly receptive to big-name U.S. software.

Running down a brief list of big games, the Mortal Kombat games haven't made a dent in Japan. Killer Instinct hardly saw the light of day and Primal Rage—of all things, a game where giant dinosaurs fight each other, which sounds like a sure-fire eye-catcher in Japan—wasn't exactly jousting with the Samurai Shodown titles on Japanese arcade charts. Tomorrow, games from Quake to Ultima IX to NFL GameDay will probably have extreme difficulties breaking through in Japanese sales. Why is this? Some of it can be attributed to the unique nature of the Japanese marketplace; Ultraman and wedding simulations won't sell here, Steven Seagal and Barney's Hide and Seek won't sell there, but Street Fighter 2 and Arnold Schwarzenegger can sell in both markets. Another key to understanding the situation is the long-whispered practice of Japanese companies intentionally keeping foreign games out of wide-scale distribution in both arcade and home formats—the possible reasons for this practice are many and worthy of exploration, but not here and not right now.

What's important is that Sony—using the trendiness of English words as a marketing scheme—is actually making an effort to establish a number of yôgé in the Japanese marketplace, and even more crucial to the global success of the games industry is the concept that other companies should follow their example. Increased global competition has been proven time and time again—especially with Japan—to result in better-quality products at more reasonable prices, and as is the case with Western movies, even a couple successful U.S. and European imports could create a snowball effect leading to greater market penetration.

Of course, it won't be as easy as having a single prominent Japanese company working to crack the market wide open; U.S. and European game publishers should start cooperating today to show Japanese gamers some of the excellent software their Western brothers and sisters have been working on for so long, lest we find even more of the world's best software reaching only a fraction of its intended audience.

–Jer Horwitz,
Editor-in-Chief

Don't just ᴅᴏᴅɢᴇ ROCKETS,

DANCE ᴡɪᴛʜ ᴛʜᴇᴍ,

SING ᴀ ꜱᴏɴɢ ᴛᴏ ᴛʜᴇᴍ,

ᴛʜᴇɴ TATTOO

YOUR

ON THEIR

NICKEL
PLA

One dreamy night with Mario...

IG,
What is going on there? How can you compare Nights to Mario 64?

Mario 64 is far from being finished, and has totally different gameplay. Also, the graphics of Nights are by far better, feature more colors, more textures and detailed objects. If you compare these two games, then the result has to be: Nights wins hands down over Mario 64 graphically!

Hans Ippisch
Nuremberg, Germany

[Ed.: Pardon the dry pun, but it's a bit too early to pass judgment on how comparable Nights and Mario 64 truly are. At the time you wrote your letter to us, no one in the media or general public has actually played the game—Sega has shown a video tape and provided some screenshots, and for those interested enough to ask questions, Sega has been nice enough to try to answer them. Mario 64, Sonic X-Treme (Sega of America's most important game) and Nights (Sega Japan's smaller project) will all share some common play mechanics, but of course will each have their own unique features as well.

Nights allows players to engage in different types of gameplay—walking Mario 64-style in 3-D and flying in a sort of Panzer Dragoon style as well—so there is definitely some grounds for comparison. We think it's a bit hasty on your part to judge the game's overall graphic appeal based solely on the materials provided to date—how can you truly count the number of colors, textures and "detailed objects" when you've played neither game and at best watched small snippets of video from either? Nights does look good, but will it outdo Mario overall? Wait a little while before you jump to conclusions or allow other people to tell you where to jump.]
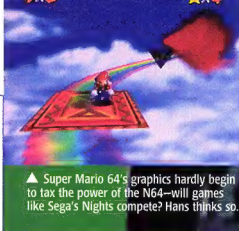
▲ Super Mario 64's graphics hardly begin to tax the power of the N64—will games like Sega's Nights compete? Hans thinks so.

You tell 'em, Frank

IG,
Let me start by saying, "Great magazine!" If the jump from issue to issue is as big as it has been with FUSION, I think you guys are going to really rake in the readership—maybe you can put Monkey Boy and his rag out of business—you never know. Anyway, I have a couple of questions, and I'd rather get the answers from a magazine that doesn't use "bliss" as a benchmark.

First, let's start with a topic which I'm sure has been on more than just a few minds. Why do game companies make us wait so long for U.S. releases of Japanese games? With converter cartridges costing around $30, and import games costing barely over their soon-to-be released U.S. counterparts, what reasons does the game industry have for us not importing? Why not import if you have to wait two to 12 months for a game to be released in the U.S., if at all?

Also, what about Sega's cancellation of Indy 500 before it went anywhere? What about Manx TT? Heck, Golden Axe: The Duel still hasn't seen the light of day in the U.S. Rumors have been around that Sega picked up import rights to King of Fighters '95. Will they take nearly a year to release it like they did Toshinden Remix?

Finally, I must say that this coming year looks great for gamers and companies alike. I think it is high time that everyone, no matter what system(s) you own, stop this system wars/advocacy nonsense and just enjoy the games. Anyone who thinks any of the above systems will be paperweights in 1996 is quite mistaken. No, the Nintendo 64 will NOT rule. Neither will the Sega Saturn nor the Sony PlayStation. Sit back, enjoy the games, and don't call the person who owns some other game system an "idiot" for their choice. If you really want to be an advocate, let your friends play your games, and let them make the decision as to whether they want to buy a system like yours or not.

True advocacy is a gentle nudge, not a cliffhanging push.

Frank Provo
Seattle, Washington

[Ed.: First, thanks for sticking with IG as we've gone through our evolution in the last few months from FUSION to Intelligent Gamer. As you've noticed, we're working all the time to improve the magazine's look and content, and that progress continues with this issue. Here's a question for you, though: Who's Monkey Boy?

Stepping away from our import problems: Well, companies know that the market for imported games is still relatively small, and thus they don't see pressure to release games here before the U.S. subsidiaries are ready for them. Would we like to see the discrepancy in release dates continue to diminish, as it has over the last couple of years? Yes. Will it happen? Cross your fingers, don't hold your breath.

Sega titles: Indy 500 was on the drawing boards, but Sega's official explanation was that they didn't want to spread their best arcade translation teams too thin by pressing them to convert five arcade titles (Fighting Vipers, Virtual On, Manx TT, Virtua Cop 2 and Indy) at once, perhaps causing delays at a crucial sales period of the year. The unofficial explanation has it that Sega may be intending to do "something special" with Indy 500. Manx TT hasn't been delayed, Golden Axe is still intended for release this year, and KOF '95 is currently still in limbo for a U.S. debut—SNK has no intention of releasing it here on its own, and Sega currently disavows knowledge of release plans for the game. Toshinden Remix was delayed for reasons explained in the last few issues of IG's FUSION.

And, of course, we agree with you on the subject of system advocacy. Bias is unfortunately a part of everyday life for many game players and people in general, but we try our very best to stay away from "which hardware is better?" comparisons. We'd be missing out on a lot of great software if we ruled any major machine out in 1996.]

▲ Sega currently hasn't made any official plans to bring King of Fighters '95 to the USA, but they haven't ruled it out, either.

Prime Minister, meet President Akira

IG,
Will Sega own the world? All of Sega's recent dealings with other companies has to mean something. Sega is slowly planning to conquer the entire world of video gaming. Virtuality, Panasonic, Dreamworks, LucasArts, Konami and other companies are currently in the works with Sega, and you have to wonder what Sega is doing. Soon they will trample on Sony and wipe their shoes on the president. Think about it!

Dan John
Oakville, Ontario, Canada

[Ed.: IG's Magic Eight-Ball (given to us as a gift by a former Sega employee) says: "My sources say no." Go figure.]

You must have total concentration. You must become one with your machine. Because if you don't

You will become one with your machine.

COLLISION
STATE OF PAIN

COMING SUMMER 1996

FROM POWERHOUSE ENTERTAINMENT

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Peripheral Vision

Nintendo Announces 64-Bit Packaging and Add-on Plans in Japan

Nintendo Co., Ltd. of Japan recently announced their initial packaging and peripheral plans for the launch of the Nintendo 64 in June. The Nintendo 64 itself will retail for 25,000 yen ($250), including one grey controller and an AC adaptor. As was the case with the launch of the Super Famicom in 1990, there will not be a game or a connection cable packaged with the system. Peripheral pricing (including sales taxes) is as follows: Additional AC adaptors will cost 2,500 yen ($25), S-Video Cables 2,500 yen ($25), Stereo A/V Cables and RF Switches 1,500 yen each ($15), Mono A/V Cables 1,200 yen, and RF Modulators 1,000 yen ($10). Controllers (available in black, blue, green, grey, red and yellow) will retail for 2,500 yen (about $25), and 256k memory cards (Controller Paks), will sell for 1,000 yen ($10). Machines and software displays will be set up in stores all over Japan beginning on June 14.

SEGA SAYS ™

Sega Parts Ways with Goodby, Silverstein and Partners

Goodby, Silverstein and Partners, the advertising agency responsible for Sega's advertising for the last four years, will no longer be working for Sega as of this summer. Citing creative differences, the companies reportedly mutually agreed upon the need to split at this point in time. Goodby will continue to work with Sega until June, by which time Sega will have made an announcement regarding their new advertising agency. Sega spokespeople would not comment on whether the change was related to rumors of a diminished 1996 advertising budget.

Surviving the rift will be the trademark "Sega scream," which is still planned to continue with Sega's upcoming advertising campaign. The upcoming Sega product line will include arcade-to-Saturn translations, the launch of new Sonic the Hedgehog titles across five platforms and several new sports games.

Sega Acquires European Amusement Machine Manufacturers

Not long after closing several of its European consumer divisions, Sega has purchased four amusement machine manufacturers. The four companies, JPM International Ltd., Ace Coin Equipment Ltd., Crystal Leisure Ltd. and Negocia Internacional de Technologia SA of Spain, are makers of redemption and gambling machines, with combined revenue of $64.8 million for the year ending September 1995. A purchase price was not disclosed, although the companies are valued at approximately $30-50 million.

Presumably, this will give Sega a stronger manufacturing base to stand on once the company begins to launch its proposed theme parks and arcades throughout the world.

MEGA MAN RETURNS

Capcom of Japan recently released the first screen shot of its upcoming Saturn and PlayStation title, Mega Man 8. Since the first Mega Man game was released in 1986, the series has grown to spawn over 15 titles on various platforms, an animated television series and a recently released arcade game. Now, the original Blue Bomber is set to make a return appearance on the Saturn and (depending on Sony's overly pushy "no 2-D" policies) the PlayStation this fall, and judging by the first screen shots released, the game looks to offer the first major graphical improvement for its predecessors since the early days of the popular series.

Namco develops HMD

Namco and Japanese camera manufacturer Olympus have developed a new head-mounted display for use in virtual reality-type environments. The HMD will feature full head-tracking and high-resolution stereo optics. The first application for this technology will be at a theme park set to open in the Ikebukuro district of Tokyo this summer.

This Year's Model

Argonaut Releases Latest Version of BRender Software 3-D Engine

Argonaut, developers of FX Fighter (below), StarGlider, the 3-D StarFox polygon shooter and Nintendo's FX chips, has announced that it has released a new version of its BRender software-based 3-D engine. Versions of BRender are already available for DOS, Windows 95, Windows 3.1, Windows NT, OS/2, the Sony PlayStation and the Sega Saturn, among other hardware and software configurations.

New to this version are complete device independence, which should

make life easier for developers trying to decide which 3-D accelerator to support, as well as Z-sort rendering, low-level access to the Z-buffer, dithered textures, translucency and vertex morphing, among others.

Current titles using BRender include Argonaut/GTE's FX Fighter, and Microsoft's 3-D Movie Maker. More titles are

expected from companies who have licensed BRender, including Disney Interactive, Electronic Arts, IBM, Interplay, Sega Europe and the company formerly known as Time Warner Interactive.

Square of Japan Closes SquareSoft USA

Just two months after the announcement was made that Square of Japan would be bringing Final Fantasy VII to the PlayStation platform, the company announced that they would be closing the doors of SquareSoft USA's Redmond, WA-based offices, terminating the development team responsible for Secret of Evermore, as well as the company's marketing and advertising divisions. Any and all future stateside development will take place at the company's newly furnished Square L.A. facilities.

NEWS

IG counts down the best of this month's games...

Microsoft Buys Exos: In an attempt to gain an advantage over consoles as well as enhancing their share of the lucrative computer peripheral market, Microsoft has acquired Exos, a company whose latest project has been an input device that gives the user tactile feedback. No financial terms were disclosed. ■ **Spectrum Holobyte Inks Japanese Distribution Deal:** Spectrum Holobyte and Mitsui & Co., Ltd. have signed an agreement whereby Mediaquest, the software distribution subsidiary of Mitsui, will distribute Spectrum Holobyte and MicroProse titles in Japan.

■ **Lockheed Martin Teams with Chips and Technologies to Bring REAL 3D Home:** Lockheed Martin has announced that it has entered into a development partnership with Chips and Technologies to integrate Lockheed Martin's REAL 3D technology into Chips and Technologies' recently announced HiQVideo 2D acceleration hardware. ■ Sony Passes 1 million in U.S., 700,000 in Europe: Sony Computer Entertainment of America recently announced that sell-in sales of the PlayStation have passed 1 million stateside. Sony Computer Entertainment of Europe has reported 700,000 PlayStations sold, generating more than $2 billion in revenue, making it Sony's most successful product launch. ■ GT Interactive and Scavenger Ink Deal: Scavenger, Inc., developer of the forthcoming titles Scorcher and Amok for the PC and Saturn, has signed a deal under which GT Interactive will distribute Scavenger's PC games. The first titles to be released under this agreement will come out in summer of this year ■ **EA Purchases South African Distributor:** Electronic Arts has acquired Visio Software Limited, a software distributor based in Johannesburg, South Africa. This move gives Electronic Arts an established distribution network to build on throughout the African continent.

■ Video Games to be in Japanese Convenience Stores: Daiei Convenience Systems, a company affiliated with Daiei Co. who operate department stores throughout Japan and Hawaii, announced that they would be carrying the Nintendo 64 in their Lawson convenience stores. This echoes an earlier announcement that Seven-Eleven of Japan would be stocking Square's Final Fantasy VII upon its release.
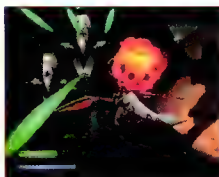
CURRENT RELEASE: TOP 10

1. **Panzer Dragoon Zwei**
   Sega / Saturn
2. **Night Warriors: DarkStalkers Revenge**
   Capcom / Saturn
3. **NBA Shoot Out**
   Sony CE / PlayStation
4. **Guardian Heroes**
   Sega / Saturn
5. **Street Fighter Alpha**
   Capcom / PS & Saturn
6. **Command & Conquer**
   Westwood / PC-CD
7. **Wipeout**
   Psygnosis / PS & Saturn
8. **Virtua Fighter 2**
   Sega / Saturn
9. **Sega Rally Championship**
   Sega / Saturn
10. **Descent II**
    Interplay / PC-CD

ARCADE GAMES

1. **Tekken 2**
   Namco
2. **Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3**
   Midway
3. **Bust-A-Move Again**
   Taito
4. **Marvel Super Heroes**
   Capcom
5. **NHL Open Ice**
   Midway
6. **Mortal Kombat 3**
   Midway
7. **Viper**
   Fabtek
8. **Gal's Panic 2**
   Kaneko
9. **Kabuki Klash**
   SNK
10. **Samurai Shodown 3**
    SNK

Courtesy of RePlay Magazine, April 1996
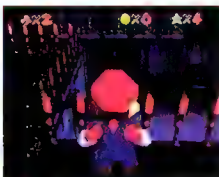
EDITORS' MOST WANTED

1. **Super Mario 64**
   Nintendo / Nintendo64
2. **TetrisPhear**
   Nintendo / Nintendo64
3. **Street Fighter Alpha 2**
   Capcom / PS & Saturn
4. **Contra 32**
   Konami / PS & Saturn
5. **Pilotwings 64**
   Nintendo / Nintendo64
6. **Final Fantasy VII**
   Square / PlayStation
7. **Rave Racer**
   Namco / Windows 95
8. **Daytona USA C.C. Edition**
   Sega / Saturn
9. **Killer Instinct 64**
   Nintendo / Nintendo64
10. **Sonic X-Treme**
    Sega / Saturn

READERS' ONLINE TOP 10

1. **Virtua Fighter 2**
   Sega / Saturn
2. **Tekken 2**
   Namco / PlayStation
3. **Resident Evil**
   Capcom / PlayStation
4. **Wipeout**
   Psygnosis / PlayStation
5. **Ridge Racer Revolution**
   Namco / PlayStation
6. **Loaded**
   Interplay / PlayStation
7. **Sega Rally Championship**
   Sega / Saturn
8. **Clockwork Knight 2**
   Sega / Saturn
9. **Motor Toon Grand Prix**
   Sony CE Japan / PlayStation
10. **Street Fighter Alpha**
    Capcom / Saturn

Bill Schmel
(sch19@charlie.webserve.net)

ANDERSON,
I NEED A VOLUNTEER.

THAT TANK UP THE
ROAD? SOMEONE'S GOTTA
TAKE IT OUT.

I NEED SOMEONE I CAN
COUNT ON. SOMEONE WHO'S
MAN ENOUGH TO RUN
THROUGH MACHINE-GUN FIRE
TO GET THE JOB DONE.

AND ANDERSON,
THERE COULD BE A MEDAL
IN IT FOR YA.

IG ADVOCACY

IG

You want a rant? Well, here's a rant...

There has been quite a bit of argument in the online video game community concerning Electronics Boutique's decision to market import titles. Some people (and magazines) claim that the import titles can only hurt the American counterparts to Japanese companies. They envision a lower profit margin for U.S. companies due to more people buying the Japanese titles at a higher cost rather than waiting several months (or a year in some cases) for the domestic version of the software. That scenario seems to be the most probable, if the domestic corporations do not adapt new strategies.

I've been buying Japanese import titles since the first days of the Super Nintendo/Super Famicom. Out of about 150 SNES, PlayStation, and Saturn titles, 38 of my games are imports. The really sad part is that about half of my import titles never saw the light of day in the States. Why? Stupid decisions on the part of the domestic corporations and the lack of variety in the mass market. Some of those decisions are impossible to understand. Take SquareSoft for instance: They decided to create an entire development team, borrow the engine from a previous game, and make a poor title (Secret of Evermore) instead of spending a little time translating a much better Japanese title (Secret of Mana 2.) This type of ignorant behavior runs rampant in other American companies as well.

Another extremely annoying and common behavior is the extremely long transition time from Japan to the U.S. American companies have taken the attitude that they can take their sweet time to translate a game because only a small group of gamers will shell out the extra cash to buy an import title. Don't let them give you the excuse that it actually takes that long to translate a title—it shouldn't take more than two months to rebuild a game from scratch if you have the source code. Text translation time for a lot of games is minimal; RPGs take a long time to translate, but not nearly as long as companies would have us believe.

I believe the decision of a major retail chain to carry import games will cause a much-needed shakeup in the video game industry. Once domestic companies realize that people are willing to fork over the slightly greater amount of cash for an immediate import instead of waiting six months for the U.S. translation, they will change their method of operation or lose their customers. When they see people willing to buy a greater amount of non-standard games (RPGs, simulations) they will more strongly consider bringing those titles out. Some companies already realize that a faster import translation will make them more money—hats off to Capcom and Sega for their fast translations! If Electronics Boutique's little experiment goes well, we will be seeing a greater variety of domestic titles translated from their Japanese counterparts in record time.

Derin Zerr
Sioux Falls, SD

IG ADVOCACY RESPONSE

As you can assume from the breaking news that Electronics Boutique stores have ceased their tests, it became clear during the course of their import trial period that the retailer incurred the wrath of several displeased American divisions of Japanese companies. Namco and Sony were among those who apparently weighed in against importing, and there's little doubt that Playmates—the company set to release an almost unchanged Battle Arena Toshinden 2 for North American audiences this month—was besides itself with the news that a national retail chain was cutting into its potential profits.

All of this obscures two much larger issues, however: Many companies continue to release their products into the Japanese market first, holding back on anxious gamers in the U.S. and Western Europe, say nothing of the less-developed marketplaces in South America, Australia and Eastern Europe. Additionally, entrepreneurial companies are beginning to turn significant enough profits through game importing that even major retail chains such as Electronic Boutique are beginning to take notice.

Both of these issues and years of prior experience lead *Intelligent Gamer* to a conclusion: Simultaneous releases of software are possible—as much was achieved with the ultra high-profile and mass-manufactured cartridge Sonic the Hedgehog 2—and will become increasingly demanded as companies hold off on English-language releases of largely playable and technically compatible Japanese NTSC games. Especially in an era in which compact disc manufacturing speeds production times and global name recognition is becoming important to companies, simultaneous releases are easier and have the potential to be more exciting than ever before.

It seems largely unfair to gamers around the world that Asia would have access to Ridge Racer Revolution when the rest of the globe might just be unpacking the original Ridge Racer, and that Europe would be months ahead of other countries with stellar titles such as Wipeout and Destruction Derby—at the very least (see this issue's Editorial, Yógé) Sony is attempting to get Japanese players excited enough about Western-developed games that there might be demand there for foreign products. We are not so naive, however, as to believe that Sony's consumer division's efforts alone will change years of industry and public disinterest in foreign games—a healthier pedigree in Japanese arcades will be necessary to boost interest in eventual U.S. and European console translations, and Asian release dates for titles such as Wipeout and Destruction Derby must be brought closer to their Western releases so as to give them equal technological advantage with Japanese-produced products.

IG looks forward to reader responses on this subject and other important topics of the day. To get involved in IG Advocacy, jump to *Intelligent Gamer* Online on AOL (keyword: IG) or find us on the World Wide Web at [http://igonline.escape.com] and [http://primanet.com/~igonline]. E-mail (IGLEE@AOL.COM) and print responses (see IG Communications and Queries) are also welcome.

C

Industry Plus

For the last several months, Sony has been making small waves with big-name developers by increasingly restricting the number of two-dimensional _____ _____ ____ _____ _____ ___ _____ _____ ___ ___ U.S. Buoyed by the success of Sega 3-D experimentation and fighting, some have decided that 2-D is old hat and that Sega can keep their 2-D supremacy.

_____ ___ _____ __ ____ ___ _____ _____ __ _____ _____ ___ _____ 2-D _____ _____ from Night Warriors to Tower of Doom to Street Fighter Alpha 2 ___ ____ _____ ___ ____ ____ Mega Man series and fighting game re-hash, that _____ 2-D developers unable only dreams of the all recently, Sony has been bombarding Capcom with _____ ____ _____ _____ Capcom's Japanese executives to mull whether or not developing PlayStation games is even worth the trouble. After seeing Sony's successful string of Fighters 3's purchases, Capcom was reportedly so enthusiastic about pursuing N64 explorations that they are holding to make the same technology in the upcoming parts of its two huge end-of-year arcade fighters.

Both titles are described as being as vital to Capcom's success as their best-selling arcade hits, and said to be years over budget and the long-awaited Street Fighter III, and woke we love the concepts upon rumors that its real-time and the mention of the point 2 actually appears to be happening in the wake of Sega's debut of Virtua Fighter 3. The planned play is said to be an entirely new fighting game that has been under development for more than two years, adding all sorts of new, experimental, but thoroughly play-tested fighting ideas that will elevate the fighting experience to a new plane. Because of their love for the hard 2-D terminology and their discomfort with a Sony's executives political, Capcom may ignore the PlayStation when it comes time to release these new fighters.

Another big title that has weakened the bonds between Sony and Capcom is Mega Man 8, the _____ ___ ___ ___ _____ __ both from these successors in visual performance, with huge numerous on-screen sprites that take 2-D platformers further than ever before. Sony, insistent upon three-dimensional software, has directly said that they have little interest in yet another 2-D game. Sega and Nintendo have not come to play nice. As a result, Mega Man 8 may be one of not a long series of 2-D games available exclusively on platforms other than the PlayStation.

The average consumer is looking for good new games and little more from their gaming hobby, which is the primary reason that both Nintendo and its team of core N64 developers are mostly confident that the new 64-Bit machine will succeed in both Japan and North America, if not Europe. Nintendo Power magazine, after all, reaches at least a million dedicated fans of Nintendo's games, and the Japanese market is proven to be easily sold on any Nintendo product that seems to offer a few great titles. Europe (home to the eerily successful Atari and Amiga computers) has traditionally been a tougher sell for Nintendo, though pockets of dedicated fans are everywhere throughout France, Germany and Britain.

So, from the standpoint of the average consumer, if Nintendo delivers a good set of solid games both at launch and for the next couple of years, they'll be just fine if not market leaders in two or three key territories. What most people don't know about the Nintendo 64 is that while Nintendo has done a good job of recruiting talented small developers and great lesser-known development toolmakers to work as second-parties and engineers, the industry's traditional strongholds have been getting cold feet about tying the knot with Nintendo. Companies such as Nichimen Graphics are responsible in part for making the development of Mario 64 possible, Paradigm the development of PilotWings 64 and H2O the development of Tetrisphear—these are going to be key exciting titles for the machine, and despite the companies' lack of name recognition, their internally developed tools and knowledge of the SGI-derived N64 hardware places them ahead of the curve in value to Nintendo as a company.

It's the question of whether the N64 will become popular that is keeping Konami and Capcom at bay. Since Nintendo changed their exclusivity policy—whereby all N64 games were to be exclusive to the machine—to allow companies to release one exclusive N64 game and hit multiple platforms with anything else, both companies are apparently set to announce that their N64 exclusive titles

Power Shifts

will be solid but not hugely successful (a Konami soccer game, for example) sequels to older games, while their biggest guns (a.k.a. Castlevania/Contra/SF3/etc.) will be released across multiple formats—only including the N64 if it becomes popular.

What frightens even Nintendo's biggest fans in the development community is the possibility that the N64 might go the way of the Virtual Boy, as people are beginning to see that Nintendo's active list of developers—as even the company's Genyo Takeda is said to have put it—"[the] Dream Team is not so dreamy." Titles are said to have slipped a bit off schedule, the total of truly promising third-party games numbers roughly three at the moment, and the only things most developers cite as N64 advantages are "better than PlayStation" graphics and the unending devotion of Shigeru Miyamoto.

In addition, the N64DD (disk drive) has been a subject of some recent developer discussion as well—some developers are pointing to the average market penetration of such peripherals (~10 percent of total userbase) as a sign that Nintendo may have real difficulties getting people to sign on to develop, despite the decreased manufacturing cost of magnetic disks.

Kumite

I [illegible]

Namco

We're already well aware that Namco Japan's singular goal [illegible] lying for a jump over to the more powerful M2 archi- [illegible] t been the best of friends [illegible] and the N64 appears doomed to receive [illegible] offbeat Namco releases, perhaps sharing that distinction with the N64 if it [illegible]

Price Point Mayhem

While Nintendo, Sega and Sony are comfortably awaiting the next round of 32/64-Bit price wars which should have started by the time you read this, Matsushita is internally undecided as of yet on the best strategy for marketing their M2-based game hardware to both consumers and developers. The device, which is still officially unnamed (and let's hope it's something just as perky as the "R.E.A.L. 3DO Multiplayer"), still has several outstanding issues left to be resolved: First, the hardware spec has not been set in stone, and there's still a chance that Matsushita will opt to pop a second PowerPC 602 chip into the box—ironically enough, the company might actually save money if they buy twice as many 602s up front from Motorola, and the graphics processor (no longer as encumbered by a CPU bottleneck) will be able to better apply all of its special effects to larger numbers of polygons. Second, Matsushita's technical staff is divided into at least two camps: One apparently wants to see the console ship for $299 with DVD compatibility—an extra option which would add roughly $50 to the value of the components in the box—and another just wants to send it out the door with its current configuration (M2 chipset, eight megs of RAM, quad-speed CD). Third, the company has not yet announced its royalty fees, so though many developers are anxious to make games for the hardware, most won't start work on the machine until they know how much money they'll get from each game sold.

As of press time, *IG's* editors and writers were busy packing their bags for America's biggest gaming trade show, the Electronic Entertainment Expo being held in Los Angeles in the middle of May. Officially, you'll hear about the thrilling events that took place for all to see: The American debut of the Nintendo 64, the premier of Sony's Crash Bandicoot promotion and a cyberpunk adventure under development by Blue Shift, as well as Sega's first public showing of Sonic X-treme and Nights, their two big 3-D platform games for 1996. On the PC side, developers will be showing everything from new 3-D games to new PC peripherals, and the hottest developers will come bearing console-quality 3-D action and sports titles. We'll have a full report from the show in the next issue, but for now, here's...

THE E3

E3: N64

N64'S PROSPECTIVE HIGHLIGHTS

Nintendo plans to highlight the American debut of their brand-new game system, the Nintendo 64, with an official launch event the day before E3. Highlights will be the nearly complete versions of Super Mario 64 and PilotWings 64 (shown here)—both potentially renamed by this point—and several key extra North American and European titles ranging from H2O's Tetrisphear to LucasArts' Shadows of the Empire and Rare's Killer Instinct 2. Several titles, including William Doom 64, may be premiered in closed-door invited audience sessions only, and a slew of previously unannounced developers will make official their ties with Nintendo. Included on the new official developer list will be Bomberman-makers Hudson Soft, who recently announced an N64 cartridge title in Japan, as well as Kemco, Konami and UBI Soft.

NINTEDOO'S

As development proceeds on Nintendo's flagship Japanese launch titles Super Mario 64 and PilotWings 64, Nintendo of America has released a collection of new screenshots showing off hitherto unknown features in each game.

For their mascot's part, Nintendo has considerably broadened the plumber's repertoire. Mario now has both a winged hat—the third fresh take on his ability to fly (following, of course, his raccoon outfit and yellow cape) and a reflective metal outfit as well. He can traverse through his new worlds in plenty of ways, including hand-over-hand climbing, riding magic carpets on rainbows through the clouds and jumping with a spinning circular motion which resembles his Super Mario World alternate jump. Mario can pick up various things and throw them—both enemies and other objects—and using his hands to scale mountains and buildings will become as integral to the new Super Mario as using his feet to squash enemies was to the old Mario character.

Pilotwings is looking similarly impressive. Players will be able to fly through models of actual locales such as the Grand Canyon and New York's Ellis Island and Statue of Liberty in addition to the scenic areas previewed in *IG's* FUSION issue nine, and one of the game's other new features has been revealed: As was the case in the original PilotWings, you'll be flying combat missions for at least a small part of the game, though these new missions will equip you with offensive weaponry to strike back with.

SHOW TIME
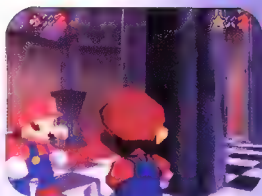
In early April, Nintendo Co., Ltd. (NCL) released these new shots of Super Mario 64 and PilotWings 64 to the gaming press and on the Internet. Mario 64 looks to be almost finished, with some new features such as transparency effects and a new morphing technique like the one in the movie T2. As seen above, Mario now has the ability to fly thanks to the angel-like wings on his trusty cap.
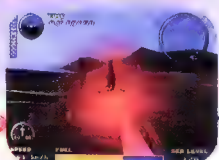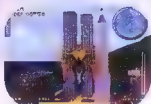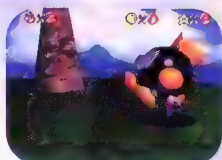
PilotWings 64 is about finished (as of press time) and features a variety of landmark areas across the United States and abroad, including the Statue of Liberty in New York and the Grand Canyon in Arizona.
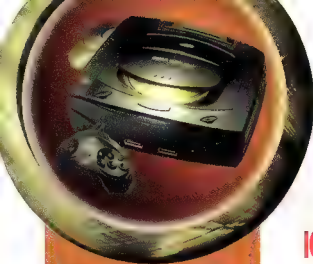
E3: SEGA SATURN

Sega has their sights set high with their new Saturn title, Sonic X-Treme. IG spoke with Sega's Mike Wallis, producer of the first-ever 3-D Hedgehog adventure.
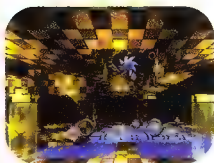
IG: What's the game's name right now?

MW: Currently, the operating title is Sonic X-Treme. That's our internal code name right now. As for the final name, we don't know at this point in time.

IG: Where did the code name come from?

MW: We kicked around a number of different names; we felt that we wanted a name that portrayed taking Sonic to the next level, so to speak (laughs).

IG: What's the game going to look and feel like?

MW: It's a complete 3-D environment. It's not a first-person view, so it's not like you're looking out of the eyes of Sonic; you will see Sonic at all times and will be able to run around with full freedom of movement within each act, which is within each level

IG: Will the camera rotate around or will it stay fixed behind Sonic?

MW: At this point in time, we're experimenting with a number of different camera views; whatever works the best and allows the player the most flexibility. We're most likely going to be building [the actors, worlds and objects] with a combination of textured polygons and sprites. For instance, the rings will be rendered sprites. We are doing hand-drawn textures and objects where appropriate.

IG: How many people are on the team right now?

MW: Currently, we have a total of around 10 people on the team, consisting of artists, designers and programmers. We plan to add a few more.

IG: How did your team's version of Sonic get chosen—there has been some talk that Sega picked the best concept from several and developed it out?

MW: This has been the design from the get-go. We pulled together a number of dynamic

and creative people from a number of different backgrounds, all of whom are very experienced and extremely self-motivated. We put the team together and everybody contributed to [the final Sonic X-Treme design], so it's not a one-man show, and that way we got the best possible design for Sonic,

> **"It's a complete 3-D environment. ...you will see Sonic at all times and will be able to run around with full freedom of movement within each act..."**

and we couldn't really accept anything less. It must be noted that the game lives and breathes and constantly changes throughout the process.

IG: What is it about this Sonic engine that will attract past fans of the series?

MW: Actually, there are four big elements from the past Sonic game: speed, graphics, simple control and amazing gameplay. We
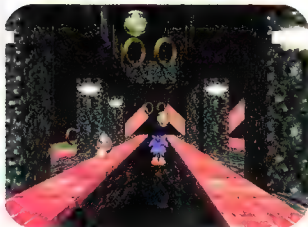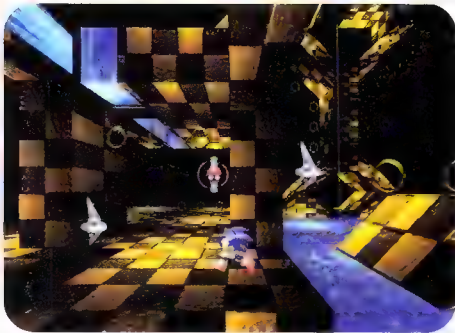
▲ Early screens of Sonic X-Treme showcase how the developers took the original "checkerboard" look and feel of the 16-Bit Sonic series and tried to evolutionize it into a 32-Bit fully three-dimensional world.

◄ The trademark Sonic rings are back, and in Sonic X-Treme, the player may likely be able to use the rings as weapons by tossing them at enemies.

MW: We're trying to keep it as much along the lines [of Sonic in terms] of the worlds themselves while making the worlds as diverse as possible. We are planning on a number of different levels or episodes. We have the traditional forest scene (very happy colors, greens and rolling hills) but we also plan to have a futuristic metallic level.

IG: Are you keeping all of the jumping on enemies and running through loops Genesis gameplay?

MW: We plan to have all of [the familiar Sonic] elements in this game, as well as additional ones. We're giving Sonic new moves, because Sonic is a hedgehog of the times, we're bringing him up to speed. There will be a very cool (and as yet, we cannot reveal) ultra-secret gameplay feature, which goes way beyond Sonic's traditional moves. There's a possibility that he'll have a move called the SpinSlash, which is basically

throwing rings, you're throwing in essence your life, so you have to make the determination whether you want to throw your last ring or hang onto it as a safety measure to get hit and survive.

[Ed. Note: At press time, Sega noted that they were reconsidering whether or not the ring-throwing and SpinSlash gameplay additions would be included in the final Sonic X-Treme design.]

IG: Any changes to the control scheme?

MW: Taking Sonic into a 3-D world, one button would just be too simplistic. We are expanding the controls and currently we're working off of three buttons.

IG: Will Sonic be able to use analog control, as Nights will?

MW: The analog control pad was specifically designed for Nights and as of now, we aren't sure if it will be compatible or not. Actually, I

"We're giving Sonic new moves, because Sonic is a hedgehog of the times, we're bringing him up to speed."

plan to have all four of those, using them as a foundation to build this new Sonic X-Treme title.

IG: When designing 3-D games, it's often difficult to come up with a 3-D game that's fun to play, fast and controllable. How have you transferred the 2-D Sonic control into the new 3-D realms of the Saturn?

MW: Of course, with the 2-D Sonic game, you had a lot of cool gameplay features, and by expanding that to the 3-D realm, you introduce new capabilities but also

new problems. For example, Sonic's jump: In the 2-D game, you could jump and know exactly where he's going to come down; however in the 3-D would, it's much more ambiguous, and we have to deal with problems like that. It's a constant iterative process that we need to go through to really refine the gameplay and get it down to an exciting level.

IG: Will the worlds look much the same as they did in previous Sonic games—will we see lots of floating platforms and loop-de-loops?

sort of like the SpinDash although it's more powerful—his spikes protrude out of the SpinDash ball, and he can use that to attack enemies and plow through them. We're also considering the possibility of having Sonic throw rings—he carried all of those rings in the past—the trade off is, that when you're

don't know if the analog control would really apply to Sonic.

IG: How about characters from the older Sonic games?

MW: It wouldn't be the same without the other guys. Of course, Robotnik is still up to no good—does the guy ever quit? I don't think so. We are also reviewing additions such as Metal Sonic as one of the Bosses As for Tails and Knuckles, those guys are being reviewed; they may make cameo appearances if nothing else. We are also considering the addition of additional characters—they're not currently playable characters yet.

IG: Does that mean you might make Sonic X-Treme a multicharacter selectable adventure?

MW: Yes, that is something that is certainly a possibility.

X-TREME

E3: SONY PLAYSTATION

Intelligent Gamer recently had the opportunity to speak with the people responsible for Namco's superb home conversion of Tekken 2. An interview with Namco's general manager for the CS development department, Mr. Shigeru Yokoyama

What was the original idea behind the Tekken series?

higeru Yokoyama: Well, we originally started using polygons for racing games. Then we started to do R&D to see if we could faithfully reproduce human movement with the use of polygons. With this in mind, we wanted to make a game with the fighting game motif, which is how the original Tekken game got started.

IG: When you thought the characters up, was it a group effort or did one person think up all the characters?

SY: For the overall game, there was a main game designer or director, but for the actual characters, there were several designers that created character ideas that were then discussed with the rest of the Tekken staff to decide what to use or change.

IG: Were there any characters that were designed that were not included in the final game?

SY: Actually, we did end up using all the characters that we created; however, during the process, many of the characters have evolved from their original design. For example, Heihachi originally appeared in the outfit of a Roman legionary. Yet, for the final Boss, this seemed to be too ridiculous and lacking in dignity. Not a character to inspire fear in the player. Which is why he has evolved to his current state. There are several characters that have undergone such a change.

IG: Are there any characters that have been changed because of questionable taste?

▲ The incredible opening intro of Tekken 2 is one of the best-looking CG scenes to date. Even the finest details, such as Nina's strands of hair, are represented perfectly.

SY: No, no. We steered clear of that. However in the case of Michelle Chang, we did change her origins after finding her oriental background to be a little bit too similar to another character. Therefore, we gave her more of a native Indian heritage.

IG: But, the name is still Michelle Chang?

SY: (laughs) Yes, the names were set fairly early on and remained the same throughout the creation of the game whether or not the character origins changed.

IG: On what hardware did you originally create the Tekken series?

SY: For the programs itself, we use or own special workstations. For the graphics, we generally use Silicon Graphics workstations with the graphics program Softimage.

IG: How long did Tekken 2 take to create?

SY: Since we had Tekken 1 as the base, we managed to make the game in about four or five months. Of course, it takes longer for a game to develop if we start from scratch.

"For the graphics, we generally use Silicon Graphics workstations with the graphics program Softimage."

PLAYSTATION'S TITLE SHOT

▲ Tekken 2, reviewed in this issue of *Intelligent Gamer* (page 72), is one of the finest achievements Namco has ever made, and will undoubtedly be one of the driving forces behind sales of Sony's PlayStation system this holiday season.

IG: Tekken 2 seems to include more moves that must be done in sequence, however you provide for the other player to react to these moves.

SY: Yes, we wanted to increase the flow of the moves [from Tekken 1 to 2], but in a way that keeps one player from getting an easy win by

▲ As a still picture, this busy street scene looks nice, but to see it in motion is truly amazing—with not a hint of slowdown.

trapping a player in a pattern. For example, we provided escape moves from King's throw combination and block points in all the 10- hit combo strings for players to find.

IG: Looking at your past track record, you often improve upon games when you port them over to the PS. Why? It adds to the cost, doesn't it?

SY: If you just look at the costs of production and time, it actually costs more to make a game for the home consumer market. As to the reasons why, it comes from the different target objectives of the arcade and home systems. In the arcade, we are looking for the player to play two to three minutes on a single credit and then to repeat the process again. However,

in the case of a home game, we are getting the consumer to buy the game outright, and would want him to feel that this game is something to keep forever. I know that this sounds pretentious, but that is the feeling that we want to impart and that we think is necessary in regards to a game that you sell for the home console. We do not want the consumer to become bored so as to sell it to a friend or used video game shop, but to hold onto as a valuable part of their own game library. That is why we feel it is necessary to add these features not available in the arcade version.

Going back to the arcade version, if we add too much opening and ending CG (computer [rendered] graphics), it lowers the profit potential of the game since people will spend more time watching rather than playing the game.

IG: Wouldn't it have made many players happy if you included endings in the arcade game for the mid Bosses as well?

SY: Yes, (laughs) but that would have slowed down the turnover as well. However, when you are talking about the home game, to increase the replay or challenge level of the game, all the characters have endings.

IG: How long did it take to do the port?

SY: Actually, I don't like to call the PS version of Tekken 2 a port of the arcade game. The arcade uses ROM while the PS uses CD format. In order to bring Tekken to the new format is a very hard process.

Also, including all the additions, it is probably more accurate to call the game a remake rather than a port of Tekken 2. Most people think that the System 11 and PS are similar, that it is easy to port a game over. However, as stated earlier, it is a very hard technical process just to go from ROM to CD. Due to various company decisions, we were under a very hard schedule to meet the deadline of March 29. So in total, about three months, including debugging time.

IG: Were there any other problems in porting the game to the PS?

SY: With the difference in size of the memory available, we have changed the texture mapping. We have tried to stay as close to the arcade version as possible. We think that it would be better if everybody, with some effort, is able to see the endings. People with little gaming expertise are paying the same amount of money for the game as an expert player and should get the same rewards for clearing the game. Therefore, we made the game as to allow the ending to be seen on any difficulty setting.

IG: Will you be doing a port of Soul Edge to the PS?

SY: Yes, we are planning to release the game sometime this year.

IG: After looking at all the new features from Tekken 2, can we expect the same from Soul Edge?

SY: Since the expectations are already there, we do not want to disappoint our users and will certainly try to add things that will meet or exceed their expectations. As to what will be put in, we have not planned or finalized anything yet.

"Including all the additions, it is probably more accurate to call the game a remake rather than a port..."

IG: As you probably know, Sega is making Virtua Fighter 3 for the Model 3 board. Do you have any thoughts on that? Will you compete with it?

SY: We are certainly doing R&D on a board that will not be overshadowed by capabilities of the Model 3, but we cannot disclose when and what sort of games may come out in the future. We will also certainly continue making games for the System 11 as well.

IG: What is next for the Tekken Team?

SY: (laughs) Actually, we haven't decided that yet either. We are busy making the game for the overseas market, but our next big project has not been decided yet. **IG**
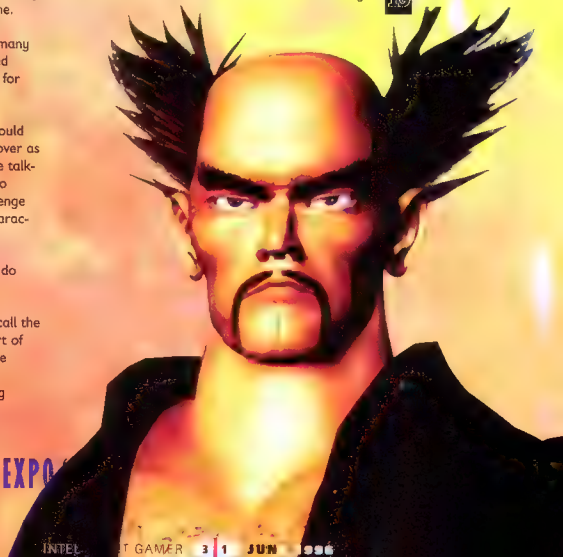
E³: PC/WINDOWS 95

An **EXCLUSIVE** Intelligent Gamer preview of **S.C.A.R.** (Self Contained Armored Robotics) by Gray Matter.

T he PC has definitely seen its share of mech-robot simulations over the past year and a half, with Activision's MechWarrior series being the most notable of the lot—so it came as a big surprise to learn that Toronto, Canada-based development house Gray Matter had pitched a battlemech concept to Microsoft roughly a year ago. Nick Gray, who came up with the concept, and Andy Smithers, who was the brains behind the design couldn't have been more elated when the richest software company in the world said "Yes." By March 1996, almost half of the company's 75-person staff had become involved in some form or another with S.C.A.R., a title which Gray's programmers believe may very well be the first "all-terrain" 3-D battlemech combat game.

IG caught up with the staff of Gray Matter for an exclusive first peek at the game. Originally called BattleMaster, S.C.A.R. will make its official debut in the Microsoft booth at this year's E³ trade show.

S.C.A.R. borrows heavily from the futuristic vision of the ultimate game show presented in the movie *Running Man*.

According to Mike Rook, one of S.C.A.R.'s programmers at Gray Matter, "The game takes place way into the future, and the Earth is all sci-fi and overpopulated. Criminalism is fairly rampant and everything is being run by meganational corporations that really don't have any conscience whatsoever to what's going on."

Rook adds, "Suddenly you find yourself convicted of some terrible crime and you need to be punished. Since there's no room left on Earth for prisoners, the megacorps start sending prisoners to off-world colonies.

One company, a giant communications firm, figures it can make a huge profit by sending prisoners

to participate in a mechanized gladiator-style television game show, having them fight in giant armored machines for their existence...and their eventual parole."

Once you arrive, you're given no more than 30 minutes to establish a strategy to overcome the various terrains that you may encounter. An on-screen 3-D wireframe map can assist in learning the terrain while uncovering other factors that may help in choosing several armaments.

According to Dave Duncan, Gray Matter's art director, "All the machines work in all 32 different environments or biospheres. It's just up to you to decide which ones will work best. For example, some drive systems will handle better in a mountainous terrain, while others may not. So, there's an element of strategy for the player, such as having to choose the right materials for the right
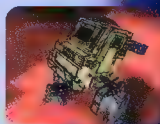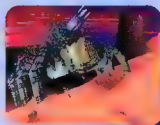
SPECIAL REPORT ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT EXPO

what he was getting, but it would have no AI in it. When we first presented it to him, we told him, "hey, we want you to provide the brains for this." He sat down with us and went over things, and we keep refining how that AI works. We take care of the stuff that is basic to baseball, and that any fan knows, but the minute you get into any strategy or AI issues, we consult with La Russa.

IG: So basically, Stormfront makes use of its licensed names for its products?

DD: That is absolutely the case. I can't name names, but I'm aware of big sports stars, a number of them, who came in, shook hands with five people, signed some autographs, drank one can of soda and left. That has been their involvement with so many other companies' products that bear their names.

IG: Is Stormfront interested in branching out into other strategic sports games such as basketball or football?

DD: On football, our alliance is with Madden at Electronic Arts. As a matter of honor, we only do a sport with one group, one way, so whatever we are going to do with football, it will be with that alliance as long as it lasts.

BASEBALL TO SPACE STATIONS

IG: Stormfront has been somewhat of a pioneer in online gaming, with America Online's

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▲ Don Daglow, President and Chief Executive Officer of Stormfront Studios.

STORMFRONT

M ost recognized by gamers for their excellent line of Tony La Russa Baseball titles, Stormfront Studios has also produced several RPGs and adventure games ranging from Gateway to the Savage Frontier for SSI, to the more recent Star Trek: Deep Space Nine—Harbinger for Viacom New Media.

Their newest projects include Madden NFL '96 for the PC CD-ROM and Mario Andretti Racing for the PlayStation. Both of these, in some form, will be shown at E³.

IG spoke with Don Daglow, president and chief executive officer of Stormfront Studios, about his company and the past, present and future of the industry. Mr. Daglow's resume reads like the nearly

unabridged history of video games: He developed the first-ever interactive baseball computer simulation in 1971 on a mainframe computer, in addition to being one of the first people hired by Mattel to bring the Intellivision video game system to market.

MORE THAN JUST A LICENSE

IG: Stormfront has long been known for producing realistic baseball simulations with excellent AI. What is it that Stormfront does to make their games so intelligent?

DD: I don't think that Stormfront produces the AI—it's actually Tony La Russa who has done that for the last five years. The way we went about doing that is that we would build the look and field of the game, so Tony would know

biosphere. It just depends how much cash or credit you've accumulated."

The game comes with two methods of play—Arcade Mode or Career Mode. In Arcade Mode, the game instantly becomes a mechanized hunt and blow-'em-up free-for-all. In Career Mode, the player runs through the whole gammit of 32 levels, having to complete the different biospheres and objectives before even thinking of getting out on parole.

Short spurts of "live" FMV are also interjected into the game. This time though, the video is a glossy sportscast, complete with silly antics of a news anchor played by Joe Flaherty (of SCTV fame).

Paying attention to detail is one thing Gray's programmers have adhered to since Nick Gray's paper concepts. One obvious detail

is dirt and smoke effects trailing from a player's machine (or S.C.A.R.), while another would be the smoke and shells that come flying out of a gun's turrets after shooting a barrage of weaponry.

Another interesting feature is the ability to destroy terrain. With the right weapons, one can strategically obliterate a mountain to get a clear shot at an opponent, each hit adjusting the terrain's height physically and visually. Even the terrain is scarred with every missile blast. This feature can come in handy for those in a pinch during a multiplayer session, especially when one player blasts a trench for another player to fall prey to. Or,
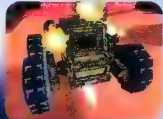
in certain biospheres with water or marshland, one can blast away at flat terrain to create a lake or to build a giant moat.

While each biosphere is different in terms of obstacle layout, one thing remains constant—gravity. If the player fails to negotiate a cliff or just happens to roll off a mountain, one can expect to see a very dizzying "free-falling" effect as terrain meets metal. The

As multiplayer functionality is a hot item with Microsoft, Gray has so far managed to get the modem head-to-head play working as well as an eight network player (IPX-LAN) / 8 CPU controlled game functioning. However, Rook says he wants to get the network play up to 16 players, which is the total limit of S.C.A.R.s on the playing field.

This strategy-laden shoot-'em-up won't come easy to those

"The game takes place way into the future, and the Earth is all sci-fi and highly overpopulated."

only potential problem we saw was the possibility of a machine falling onto its back, without any ability to roll over or self-destruct. However, Rook was quick to point out that the AI wasn't quite in place yet to prevent this scenario. Although no music has been added to the game as of yet, over 15 Q-Sound controlled weapon sounds could be heard zapping across the entire stereo spectrum.

without a Pentium-based processor. Although the game's specifications call for a 486 DX-2/66 with 8 MB of memory, a minimum of 16 MB will be crucial to getting any speed. If all goes as planned, we can expect S.C.A.R to start shipping toward the end of 1996, just in time for Christmas.

Neverwinter Nights and Prodigy's Rebel Space. Is Stormfront considering bringing a networked or on-line version of La Russa Baseball?

DD: In the long term, there's no question that those types of applications as an extension of the La Russa system are coming. Ironically, one of the reasons we haven't done that yet is the desire of the company to not be solely doing baseball. Because since about half of the company ends up revolving around baseball in one way or another, the desire to do other things when doing our online stuff actually ended up pushing baseball back in the timeline of our long-term plans.

STRATEGIC GROWTH

IG: Over the last few years, the console market has had very few strategy games; does Stormfront consider this as a viable market for these types of strategy games?

mean that all types of simulation products will grow in importance on the consoles.

IG: Do you think the market for strategy games will continue to grow?

DD: Over the course of the 16 years I have made my living at this, I've seen all sorts of genres rise and fall like the tides. In 1981 the first game I programmed at Mattel was a game called "Utopia." Doing the first sim game at the time was courageous. It worked out because we sold over 250,000+ copies. It seems that when you get some hits, people rush in and you get an abundant supply, then when the market doesn't get many good ones in a while, it dries up and you have an opportunity to get back into it.

"I think what got us in '82 and '83 is [that] the industry had no 'sinking of the titanic' to look at."

DD: I think that it is absolutely an area for future growth. As time goes by on the consoles, and now that the CD-ROM is prevalent as the delivery medium, I think that you will see a situation where you will have different audiences instead of one monolithic audience to which all games are aimed. This split up of audiences will in turn

NEXT-GENERATION SYSTEMS

IG: Since Stormfront is looking for mass-market numbers before developing for a platform, what sort of numbers do you consider as mass-market?

DD: When you see a million unit installed base like the PlayStation,

you are starting to get there, but it's also an issue of velocity: If the numbers are there, you get very deep penetration, what I call "feeding frenzy," because people are anxious to get any title they can. Even though the arbitrary number of machines in the home may not resemble a mass market, you can get mass-market type numbers of sales.

IN RETROSPECT

IG: Although this question has become rather trendy in the last year, it's still worthwhile to ask you about the possibilities of a video game crash as you've already lived through the first one.

DD: The differences I see between the era now and then are the following: I think what got us in '82 and '83 is number one: The industry had no "sinking of the Titanic" to look at. Now we can look back and realize that these things happen. A lot of the people that were in the video game industry back then are still around. For that reason, just knowing that it can happen tempers the way that we do business. Number two, a big part of what got us was that there was no control in the business. You can debate the pros and cons of that control that Nintendo, Sony and Sega exert. But, since there were no controls over the systems, or we should say that the controls

failed, you had people rushing into the situation like they believed they had a license to print money. Quaker Oats, for example, opened a video game division.

They would think "put out a cartridge, and no matter what was on it, it would make money." Quality went out the window; getting done in a hurry was everything. Suddenly, two years worth of supply was being manufactured in one year. Also, the long-term market of the systems was sabotaged by companies like Commodore, who came along and very appropriately ran TV ads like "would you like to buy your kid a video game, or a computer that will help him learn, word process and do schoolwork—for only $299?"

At the same time, the suppliers of junky games produced a lot of games that didn't sell, and when the stores went to return those products, the little companies that had taken in all of this money in a hurry and spent it couldn't pay them back. The retailers then put those cartridges on bargain bin tables for $4.99. No one could make a living [competing with] that, and as a result, Atari, Intellivision and Coleco went out.

All of these factors conspire to limit the downside, much like the stock exchange where the computerized trading is cut off if the market drops off below 50 points in the day. IG
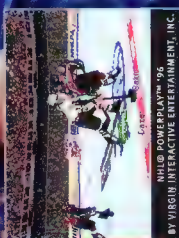
PANZER DRAGOON™ II ZWEI

BATTLE ARENA TOSHINDEN™ (REMIX) BY TAKARA™
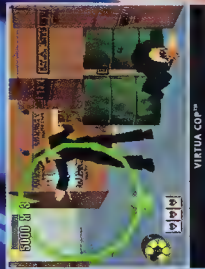
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So's got what it takes — and all the body her money can buy. So WHAT? There's no time for distractions when you're deep into Sega Saturn. Just check out those screen shots. Ba-dah-boom, ba-dah-bing, know what I mean?

You want curves? Try Sega Rally. Want a thrill? Panzer Dragoon II Zwei. Want a real knockout? Then check out Virtua Fighter II. And lots of other graced lly cool games you can play on Sat . But don't be fooled. Sega Saturn games offer more than just great looks, like three 32-bit processors (that's two more than Playstation). So if you're scoring at home — or even if you're alone), Saturn's triple processin power mean better gameplay and better graphics. And for real action, HEAD FOR SATURN.

SEGA SATURN™

By Brian Osserman

Virtual Reality in the Mass Market

It is no surprise that virtual reality has been viewed by many as the next step forward for the computer industry. As graphics and audio have progressed at an incredible rate, one aspect of gaming has remained conspicuously constant. The immersiveness has always been limited by the need for a monitor. The idea for a virtual-reality headset was conceived to transcend the limitations imposed by a monitor, and although VR is not a new idea, it hasn't changed much. The headset should be capable of showing a different picture to each eye, thereby giving the appearance that the rendered world is actually three-dimensional; and second, the headset should be able to track its own position and allow the picture shown to change accordingly to give a feeling of actually being inside the virtual environment.

Despite the intriguing premise, virtual reality has broken into the mass market quite slowly. The technology involved is still very much in the developmental stages, and therefore, quite expensive. The first company to enter the market was Virtuality, which began marketing its arcade virtual-reality systems a number of years ago. The systems were expensive, and few arcades bought them. Each play cost $5 (and usually lasted five to 15 minutes), discouraging people from playing more than once or twice. The first few games available were unimpressive, and did little to motivate gamers to move to the more expensive medium.

While virtual reality in the arcades has remained essentially static, a whole new market has opened up for virtual-reality devices for home computers. Recently a variety of virtual-reality headsets and glasses have emerged tending to fall into one of two categories: 3-D glasses without any form of head tracking (cheap and extremely light), and fully implemented headsets with their own LCD displays and head trackers. Three dimensional glasses currently on the market include Stereographics' SimulEyes, KASAN's 3D-Max and Chinon's CyberShades 3D, while full headsets include Virtual i-O's i-glasses!, Victormaxx's Cybermaxx and Forte Technology's VFX1. Forte Technologies has added a new element to the PC virtual-reality industry by including with their headset the Cyberpuck, a free-floating controller which has three buttons and which can measure roll (twisting to either side) and pitch (vertical angle).

The emergence of large amounts of virtual-

Although it isn't incredibly complicated to implement such support, it is significantly harder than adding superficial support for head tracking, and it also has the down side that it is only half as fast, as it is necessary to calculate one frame for each eye. As a result there are only a few big-name games that support stereoscopic vision. Of course this has been most damaging to the 3-D

▲ Forte Technology's VFX1 sets itself away from the pack by including in its package a separate device called the Cyberpuck. The small hand-held device acts as a remote-control unit.

glasses, as they don't have head tracking to fall back on. However, the trend is definitely toward increased support: Magic Carpet 2 supports 3-D for the i-glasses!, while the recently released Descent II supports stereoscopic graphics for nearly every virtual-reality device in existence, including all of those named above.

Implementation of Virtual Reality

The most simple form of virtual-reality device is the 3-D glasses. One of the more prominent examples of these is Stereographics' SimulEyes which look much like heavy plastic sunglasses, extremely light, and make use of liquid crystal shuttering technology. This means that the lenses are transparent, and allow you to look through and see your monitor. When playing in 3-D, each eye is alternatingly shuttered at high speeds in coordination with the game rapidly alternating between displaying two slightly offset images. The result is that your left eye only sees one image and the right eye only sees the other, and different images are calculated to create the impression that your eyes are in fact viewing the same world from slightly different angles, creating the impression of three-dimensionality. Three dimensional effects appear particularly vivid with the SimulEyes, and the glasses are incredibly easy to set up: You simply plug a device in between the video card and monitor cable, turn the control box on, tell the game you're using SimulEyes and start playing. One of the main disadvantages is the fact that each eye is only seeing an image half the time creates a flickering effect. Of course the single biggest current disadvantage is also Stereographics' biggest hurdle: lack of support.

A whole new market has opened up: that of virtual reality devices for home computers.

reality hardware has only partially been matched by supporting software. Head tracking has received substantial support, as it is relatively easy to add a new form of controller input to a game, and even when the original programmers don't do so, most companies have released drivers that make their helmet's head tracking simulate the mouse, thereby providing a certain amount of tracking support to games with no native support at all. In contrast, support for stereoscopic (i.e., 3-D) vision has been scarce.

Descent and Descent II are the only big-name titles currently supporting SimulEyes, although Stereographics are involved in active discussion with a large number of big-name developers.

The headset fits completely around the head with stereo headphones over the ears and with an LCD in front of each eye. The different images displayed for each eye create an impression of three-dimensionality in much the same way as with the SimulEyes and other 3-D glasses. A head tracker, usually incorporated into the headset itself, keeps track of the headset's orientation and constantly sends that data to the computer. Specific designs vary somewhat, with the most variation occurring in headset shape and weight and in the quality of the optics. Also, some systems allow use of special controllers as well.

Virtuality arcade headsets are of somewhat generic design; simply fitting around the head, and being on the heavy side, they tend to have

TUAL ITY MING

...not make use of the stereoscopic capabilities of the Virtuality headset. Zone Hunter is essentially a shooter; you constantly walk forward, with head tracking allowing you to look in any direction, and a special free-floating controller allowing you to naturally aim and fire in any direction. Being hit by enemies prevents you from moving forward, and you have to pass each area within a given time limit. The game is fun, but it is highly questionable whether it is worth $5 a shot. As when it entered the market, Virtuality is most limited by a lack of games that really take advantage of the possibilities presented.

The PC headsets are all fundamentally very similar: In addition to the obvious similarities, they each use a pair of seven-inch active-matrix LCDs to display the images at a resolution of approximately 180,000 pixels per eye. (This effectively means that they can handle displaying a standard 320x200 VGA image, but not nearly as sharply as a monitor.) The i-glasses! have a simple design which wraps around the head with a light frame; the whole headset only weighs eight ounces. The Cybermaxx weighs significantly more, and attempts to compensate somewhat by adding a band going over the top of the head, which is partially successful. Finally, the VFX1 is quite heavy, but is designed, looking in many ways like a bike helmet, to fit snugly around the head for...

▲ One of the least expensive VR devices on the market, Stereographics SimulEyes offers consumers a light weight package coupled with impressive features and performance.

...adjustment with an extremely wide field of view make it extremely hard to focus properly, and even when the image is at its best it is still extremely blurry around the edges. The VFX1 strikes a good balance between the two, with a larger field of view than the i-glasses! while sacrificing very little in terms of image quality; once properly focused, blurring only occurs at the extreme edges of the picture. For those games which support stereoscopic vision, the crispness of the i-glasses! make the 3-D quite vivid, while the Cybermaxx and VFX1 have less vivid 3-D.

While the VFX1's tracking does feel the best, they all suffer from an extremely noticeable lag

...virtual-reality headsets are more complex, but are all based on the same general design.

...in the distribution of weight, so the strain isn't excessive. The i-glasses! are designed to allow glasses to be worn underneath, so they require no focusing or adjustment. In contrast, both the VFX1 and Cybermaxx, bring the image much closer to the eye (their fields of view are 45 and 35 degrees respectively, versus 30 for the i-glasses!), and do not allow room for glasses. Both allow adjustment of each eye independently as well as variation of interocular distance. Tracking on all of them allows for a full 360 degrees of horizontal motion, while the range of vertical motion ranges from +/- 45 degrees for the Cybermaxx to +/- 70 degrees for the VFX1 (with the i-glasses! in between at +/- 60 degrees). List prices are $500 for the Cybermaxx, $800 for the i-glasses!, and $1,000 for the VFX1, although the i-glasses! come with the Cybermaxx controller.

Beyond the Specs

However, the specs tell a very incomplete story. For instance, while the resolutions are all the same, the image quality is affected by a number of factors. The fact that the i-glasses! require no focusing make them easiest to use, with the most consistently high-image quality. The Cybermaxx's combination of a need for focus...

▲ Virtual I-O's i-glasses offer stereoscopic vision and unique styling not to mention excellent image quality when used with games that support the unit.

...problems with slipping are far down, as often it is easiest to simply use one hand to hold them in place. Eyes may be focused individually, and when the image is fully focused and in the proper place is quite good. One distinctive quality of the Virtuality system is that, since it is in the arcade, there are no restrictions on what sort of other peripherals may be used, so controllers may be designed and/or chosen to be particularly appropriate for a given game. Interestingly, the current most common Virtuality game, Zone Hunter does...

...between when you turn your head and when the game catches up, especially when you make sharp turns. This also goes for the Virtuality set, which has noticeable but less severe lag. However the particularly interesting part of head tracking is the wide range of ways in which games support it. Some games have no built-in support, so tracking can only emulate a mouse. Some, such as Descent I and II, only have the simplest support, with turning your head simply changing the direction of your ship. This isn't particularly useful, as it is essentially made redundant by the fact that it serves the same purpose as a joystick, but cannot replace the joystick entirely. In contrast, Magic Carpet II has more impressive support for tracking, keeping track of head position independently of the direction your carpet is travelling, making for both a more immersive experience and less redundant feel. The game with the most impressive tracking support is Mechwarrior 2, which actually not only has separate variables for pilot's head position, mech's turret and mech's direction, but allows complete customization of which variables are affected by the headset.

While most software that supports virtual reality supports all three of these headsets, the VFX1 and i-glasses! are clearly better supported than the Cybermaxx, with the i-glasses appearing to have a slight edge over the VFX1 on the strength of a few isolated cases such as Magic Carpet 2, which supports both but inexplicably has stereoscopic support only for the i-glasses!

Virtual-reality gaming is an expanding field, and as the headsets continue to become better and more affordable, there is little question that more software will begin to implement more and better virtual-reality support, with the versatility of Mechwarrior 2's tracking support and the extremely broad stereoscopic support offered by Descent II both becoming more common. Virtual reality is unquestionably an imperfect technology, but it is an exciting one nonetheless. **IG**

JAPAN TODAY

PlayStation EXPO '96

Akira Kishimoto reports on this year's PlayStation Expo and unravels the mystery of Japanese distribution channels.

REPORT

Sony's PlayStation Expo '96 was held in Tokyo from March 27-29, and with a total of 78 companies with over 200 titles on display, PS Expo '96 reminded me of Nintendo's Shoshinkai at the peak of the company's Super Famicom popularity. It was nice to see companies putting some effort into their displays again.

SIMULATION GAMES

The single largest genre at the show was simulation games, ranging from your standard war simulations, such as Oz Club's Daisenryaku, to the uniquely Japanese marriage simulation Marriage by Shogakukan Productions. In between are an assortment of horse breeding/ racing, city building/management and child raising simulations, and as you can probably tell, there are people here who will play anything if it is a simulation of some sort.

Of the multitude of simulation games, a game that caught my attention was Taiyo-no-shippo (The Sun's Tail: Wild, Pure, Simple Life) by Artdink. In this whimsical action-oriented simulation, you lead a group of cavemen to various places on the map to find and combine items to advance the technical level of your primitive tribe. One of the objectives is to create a tower to grasp the sun's tail, and a special event is said to be waiting for the player who can reach that level of sophistication.

Another simulation game that looked solid was Pandora Project (left)—The Logic Master by Team Bughouse. You become a programmer responsible for the battle logic program that will guide a droid through a battlefield. The number of commands available to put in the logic program are a bit intimidating at first, but they're not so bad when you actually start to use them, and the more sophisticated a logic program is, the more situations your robot can react to. On the down side, the more complicated your logic becomes, the greater the chance that your robot will go haywire. My favorite feature: You can take your robot data and have it fight against a friend's to see who is the better creator of a battle simulator

3-D GAMES

One 3-D game that really caught my attention was Beltlogger 9 (top) by Genki, the creators of Kileak the Blood. As was the case with Kileak when it first debuted, stunning visuals and a Doom-style graphics engine are the highlights of your quest to explore a station on Mars. The main difference from Kileak the Blood now is an option that allows you to jump and fire from above adding to a more free 3-D environment. Another game that was generating interest was Kowloon's Gate (left) by Sony Music
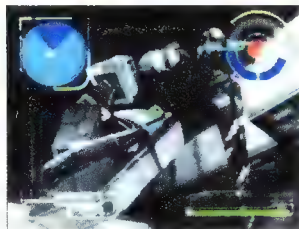
Entertainment— having seen pictures of its amazing rendered video content, people are drooling over the potential but are frustrated by the lack of an official release date. (Kowloon's is currently set for a spring release and is finally in the last few polishing stages of production.) The premise: You travel around a Blade Runner-style rendition of Hong Kong to find clues to your mysterious objective. The motion on the surface is handled using CG movies (i.e., you flow from one point to another after entering a command rather than directing the entire movement from one point to another). Important people you will meet have separate conversation windows that will show facial animations while that character speaks to you in realtime.

ADVENTURE GAMES

Another large genre at the show was adventure games. Many of the adventure games were based on well-known anime series, such as 3x3 Eyes by Xing Entertainment and Bandai's Dragonball Z. There were also many games similar in style to Capcom's Bio Hazard (Resident Evil), including Over Blood (below) by Riverhill Soft, which thankfully allows you to change the camera's perspective to suit your needs, whether you're taking on an enemy or trying to solve a puzzle
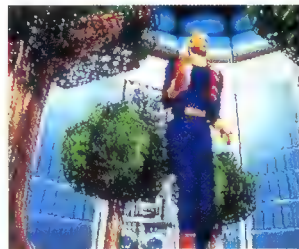
Generating the most controversy at the show was Warp's Enemy Zero (a.k.a. E0). Problems arose when Warp made the dramatic public announcement that it would put the game on hold indefinitely for the PlayStation because of a "difference in distribution policies" in use by Sony, though rumor has it that the game's bloody content was too violent for some of Sony's more conservative management. Warp President Eno, who has a flair for the dramatic, made this announcement while having one of the largest booths at the show—they had the most girls showing people how to play the game—and at a press conference for Sega, they announced that they would instead put E0 out for the Saturn. Noting that Sony's U.S. distribution policies are less restrictive, Warp still plans to put E0 into the U.S. PS marketplace.

FIGHTING GAMES

In the fighting game genre, the long-time fighting game masters at SNK have decided to port over their popular fighting games The King of Fighters '95 and Samurai Shodown 3, but unfortunately, they only had videos running of the games and the older arcade versions. When the PS versions were compared to the Saturn versions, the former had fewer animation patterns and less color. The PS version will not have a cartridge and CD format like the Saturn version, which will increase the load time dramatically.

Capcom had both Vampire (DarkStalkers) and X-Men on display. Vampire looked like a decent port, but many PS users were disappointed that the sequel is Saturn exclusive. X-Men is ready to launch this spring, and is even better than the Saturn version with smoother animation and detail, as well as faster access time

Bandai had ZXE-D on display, a game in which you buy both the game and a memory card with preprogrammed robot data to make and arrange your own robots The memory card will also include a plastic model of the robot. Another impressive title was Ranma 1/2: Battle Renaissance (right) by Shogakukan, with

characters that you could actually control, although the game was unplayable. Fans of the series will be delighted to know that the characters will be able to transform mid-fight, just as they do in the manga. Known characters in the game thus far are Ranma, Ryouga, Genma, Akane and Shampoo.

My personal pick for the best fighting game at the show, excluding the well-documented and now-released Tekken 2 by Namco, was Zero Divide 2: The Secret Wish (bottom) by Zoom. Smoother visuals and faster control response differentiate the game significantly from the sluggish controls in Rise 2 or the questionable animation in Jaleco's Slam Dragon. ZD 2 delivers solid game play with the cool mechs from the original and new models as well. The game controls haven't changed much, but some features have been added. In the original, armor would gradually get weaker until it became translucent. In ZD2, the armor is broken off, leaving only the underlying skeleton. Also, a side step has been added that adds depth to each fight.
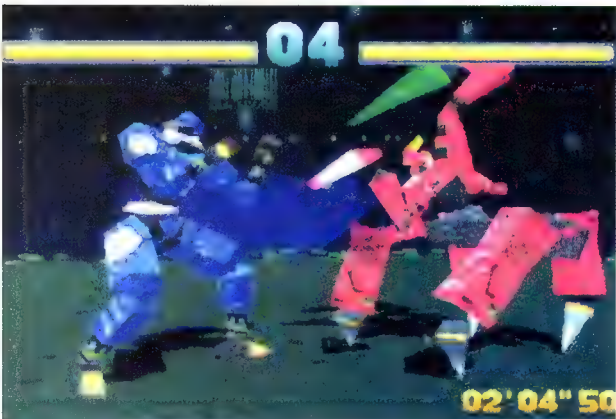
ACTION AND SHOOTING GAMES

In the action and shooting department, Sony's Jumping Flash! 2 (left) seems to be their next big hit. The object is to save four Moo Moo aliens (they were your enemies in the previous game) per stage and then head for the exit. Control-wise the game is the same, but the cockpit layout has been somewhat changed: there is a new addition of a jump meter that you can use to better time your double and triple jumps. The movement speed has been increased as well, and enemies speak English rather than Japanese—I wonder if this will count as educational software?

A shooter that will truly excite anime fans is Macross: Digital Mission VF-X by Bandai Visual. The opening shows several Veritech fighters transforming into their various modes—the game may attract some for the opening CG alone. You play from behind the mech and transform to suit your purposes—thankfully, the launch of the missiles is just as impressive as it is in the popular anime.

RACING GAMES

There were also many racing games that looked nice or cute, such as Motor Toon Grand Prix 2 (below), but after Namco's Ridge Racer Revolution, most other games do not quite measure up on the intensity scale. The various ideas and parts as in Takara's Choro Q make for fun gameplay, but many other companies do not seem to put the same time or effort into creating a good racing game—Deadheat Road and Formula Circus by Nichibutsu are examples of this. There were few racing games from Japanese makers that caught my attention and hence my attention drifted to some U.S. imports. Wipeout by Psygnosis seemed to be the only other racing game of note unless you like the crashing and blocking of Destruction Derby by Psygnosis or Road Rash by EA.
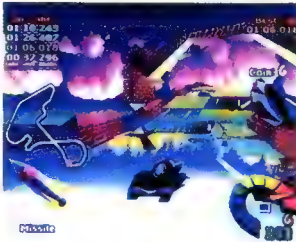
The main difference to this show as opposed to many other game shows was how strongly Sony was trying to market Yógé games (games from overseas). They had a large selection of games made in the U.S. such as Descent, Road Rash and Destruction Derby—a total of over 40 Yógé on display. The trend in Japan had previously been to ignore games from overseas as unsuitable for the Japanese market, but with Sony's strong marketing clout, the Japanese game scene may be in for a big change. IG

The Mystery of Japanese Distribution Channels

Getting products to anxious customers may seem simple in a country as geographically compact as Japan—Federal Express or commercial Japanese airplanes could surely take new games from north to south in only hours, right? It's not that simple. In Japan, each of the big three hardware makers has its own distribution system for hardware and software, established in an effort to tightly control the prices and flow of products within the country.

Nintendo has a group of large distributors collectively known as Shoshinkai for the distribution of Super Famicom and other Nintendo-related products, Sony chooses to do all of its own distribution for PlayStation games, and Sega has a company called Sega United to handle distribution of Saturn games and other Sega-related products. These various distribution channels will affect the price of software, availability and the speed of repeat

The "Reservation System"

One of the ways of consumer and its is going product a is and a to be ... (illegible)

all of the games made by various third-party publishers and then selling the games to either a second tier of distributors or to large chain store operations that purchase many games at once. Chain stores include Yodabashi Camera, a large retailer with many outlet stores or Brut, a chain store operation that has over 50 locations nationwide. (Brut is comparable to a chain such as Electronics Boutique in the States.) The second tier of distrib-

cutting down on the costs and time involved in delivering products to the store—a delivery truck route will have a full load sooner with both types of products to deliver to various stores, as opposed to carrying stock of a single product type. Sony also has had the product delivery system in place from their long years of experience in the music business. Sega has a similar structure in place with Sega United, but cannot match the speed of delivery for repeat orders as quickly as Sony can.

Here's the most interesting fact about game distribution: In most cases, Sony can deliver a repeat order for a PlayStation game within a week—even if they have no inventory—by simply pressing more copies of the necessary game CDs. Sega can do the same thing with Saturn games, but generally takes about 10 to 14days to deliver the software. By contrast, in the case of a Super Famicom game—and this happens in the United States with Super NES games and may well happen again with Nintendo 64 cartridges worldwide—if there is no inventory in the stockpiles of the second or first tier of distributors, the publisher is forced to make more copies of a game which is cartridge-based. Since the manufacture of ROM cartridges takes much longer than pressing a CD, it can take as long as two months to get a second batch of cartridges out the door in Japan, and three months in America. As you might imagine, as the key sales time for a heavily promoted game is within the first two months of release, ordering too few copies of a Nintendo game means lots of disappointed customers waiting for months, and too few Sony games means only a one-week delay. Therefore, it becomes essential for stores to order the correct quantity of Nintendo games, while there is much more leeway for PS and Saturn games.

These various distribution systems affect the prices of software available at the retail stores and used game shops. In general, stores that sell SF and Saturn games are allowed to set the price of any title, and game specialty stores will often set the price lower than the publisher's suggested retail price in order to attract customers. Another reason that a game may be

> **In Japan, each of the big three hardware makers has its own distribution system for hardware and software, established in an effort to tightly control the prices and flow of products within the country.**

(follow-up) orders being delivered. The complexity of Japanese distribution leaves store managers in the less-than-enviable and continual pursuit of juggling current inventory with a steady flow of up-and-coming products

Nintendo has the most complicated distribution system. The first tier in their distribution pyramid is the Shoshinkai—remember the name from a certain November show?—a group of large companies responsible for first buying

utors will sell games to toy stores and the smaller Mom-and-Pop game shops which dominate the Japanese gaming scene.

Sony and Sega's distribution systems are not quite so complicated. Sony takes orders directly from stores and delivers software as needed, much like in the music CD business. In fact, Sony Computer Entertainment uses the same delivery systems as its Sony Music Entertainment division, which results in

Huge sale bins aren't uncommon in many Japanese gaming outlets. The used games market is much bigger there are ... (illegible) ... to selling off their games ...

much lower than suggested retail: When a distributor orders too much stock and then is forced to dump a game to clear his inventory, other distributors will panic, match the price and incur a loss as well. (A case of this occurred last Christmas when Lady Stalker by Taito was sold on the first day of the game's release at 20 percent of the suggested retail price.) As a game gets older and more used games start to circulate, a store will again lower the price of the software in order to sell it. One store owner commented that it is better to lose some money and bring in a new title rather than having an older game sit on the shelf and take up inventory space. In many game specialty shops—which Japan thankfully has a lot of—you will see this happen with SF and Saturn games since the store deals with new and used software

Despite a recent surge in sales of Saturn and PlayStation...

In Japan the packaging of games is generally smaller than in the U.S. where the policy seems to be "he who has the biggest, most viewable box...

Yet this does not happen with PlayStation games—at the moment, because of tight Sony distribution policies, no matter how old a title gets, the price of the software will not change The only time you will see a PS title cheaper than normal is when it is at a store that sells used PS games, but never will the price be lower

...it is better to lose some money and bring in a new title rather than having an older game sit on the shelf...

than retail on new PS games in new game shops. You will also sometimes see cheap PS games being sold at small corner/street stalls—places of questionable legality here—but generally speaking, the price of a PS game will not fluctuate.

As a consequence of Sony's policies, older stock will tend not to move since people will generally buy the newer titles. For example, the latest edition of a baseball game may sell, but the older edition will probably not, since there is no longer any merit in buying it. However, with the PS distribution system, it is possible to see both titles available at the same price, sitting on store shelves

One company that has decided not to use Sony as a distributor for PS games is Konami, which plans to distribute its own games using their own distribution channels. Since they have just started doing this recently, there have been no apparent effects as yet, but there are many companies watching closely to determine whether Konami made a good decision—Namco is one of them. 𝕀𝔾

Japan's Coming Hardware War

Clay Fighter II [Interplay]
Lucienne's Quest [Panasonic]
SnowJob [The 3DO Company]
Casper [Interplay]
Decathlon [The 3DO Company]
Robinson's Requiem [Readysoft]
JUNE 1996
1996 Olympic Games [Panasonic]
Dream Team Basketball [Panasonic]
Olympic Soccer [Panasonic]
JULY 1996
Obelisk [Panasonic]
4TH QUARTER 1996
Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3 [Panasonic]
ANNOUNCED TITLES
D2 [Warp M2]*
Clan Destiny [Virgin]

RECENT RELEASES
Battle Arena Toshinden [Playmates]
Battle Isle 2220 [Blue Byte]
Conquest of the New World [Interplay]
Deadly Skies [JVC]
Duke Nukem 3D [3D Realms]
Master of Orion II [Spectrum Holobyte]
Microsoft Return of Arcade [Microsoft]
Mortal Kombat 3 [Williams]
DOOM 95 [GT Interactive]
Voyeur II [Philips Interactive]
VR Baseball [Interplay]
WitchHaven [Intracorp Entertainment]
JUNE 1996
Battlecruiser 3000 [Take 2 Interactive]
Dungeon Keeper [Electronic Arts]
DOOM II 95 [GT Interactive]
Final DOOM [GT Interactive]
Harvester [Merit]
Hexen 95 [GT Interactive]
Magic: The Gathering [Spectrum Holobyte]
The Hind [Interactive Magic]
SimCity 2000: Special Edition [Maxis]
Space Hulk 2 [Electronic Arts]
JULY 1996
AD&D Core Rules [TSR]

Alien Central [GT Interactive]
Independence Day [FOX]
AUGUST 1996
Daggerfall [Bethesda]
Jet Fighter III [Interplay]
Metal Lords [New World Computing]
ANNOUNCED TITLES
Alien Vs. Predator [FOX]
Arcade Classics [GT Interactive]
Icebreaker [FOX]
Quake [GT Interactive]
Rave Racer [Namco]
S.C.A.R. [Microsoft]
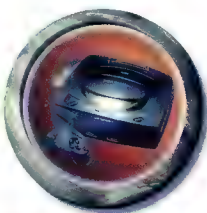
RECENT RELEASES
Creature Shock: Special Edition [Data East]
Earthworm Jim 2 [Playmates]
Guardian Heroes [Sega of America]
Iron Rain [Sega of America]
Iron Storm [Working Designs]
Olympic Soccer [U S Gold]
Primal Rage [Warner Interactive]
Return Fire [Warner Interactive]
Rise 2: Resurrection [Acclaim]
Shining Wisdom [Working Designs]
Skeleton Warriors [Playmates]
Slam 'N Jam '96 [Crystal Dynamics]
Summer Games [U S Gold]
VR Soccer [Interplay]
WipeOut [Psygnosis]
Worms [Ocean]
WWF Wrestlemania: The Arcade Game [Acclaim]
JUNE 1996
Blazing Dragons [Crystal Dynamics]
Buster Bros. Collection [Capcom]
Destruction Derby [Psygnosis]
Fox Hunt [Capcom]
Hyper 3-D Pinball [Virgin]
In the Hunt [T*HQ]
NHL PowerPlay '96 [Virgin]
P.T.O. II [Koei]
Road Rash [Electronic Arts Studios]
Shockwave Assault [Electronic Arts]
VR Baseball [Interplay]
JULY 1996
Baku Baku Animal [Sega of America]*
Bubsy 3-D [Accolade]
Golden Axe: The Duel [Sega of America]
Impact Racing [JVC]
MVP Baseball [Data East]
NBA Action '96 [Sega of America]
Oblivion [Domark]
Robo Pit [T*HQ]
The Need For Speed [Electronic Arts]
Varuna's Forces [JVC]
AUGUST 1996

3-D Baseball [Crystal Dynamics]
Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain [Crystal Dynamics]
Dragon Force [Working Designs]
Hexen [GT Interactive]
Legend of Oasis [Sega of America]
Loaded [Interplay]
NFL Legends Football '97 [Accolade]
NHL Open Ice [Williams]
Storm [American Softworks]
VR Pool [Interplay]
Season of the Wolf [Capcom]
SEPTEMBER 1996
4x4 Gears & Guts [American Softworks]
Area 51 [Williams]
Armed [Interplay]
Breath of Fire III [Capcom]
Casper [Interplay]
Command & Conquer [Virgin]
Descent [Interplay]
Magic Knight Rayearth [Working Designs]
Space Hulk [Electronic Arts]
Spot Goes to Hollywood [Virgin]
Tecmo Super Bowl [Tecmo]
Tomb Raiders [U S Gold]
W.E.T. Corpse [Vic Tokai]
4TH QUARTER 1996
Amok [Scavenger]
Angel [Scavenger]
Big Bass World Championship [Hot-B]
Bottom of the 9th [Konami]
Bug Too! [Sega of America]
Dark Sun [Data East]
Daytona USA Championship Circuit Edition [Sega of America]
Deadly Skies [JVC]
Extreme Pinball [Electronic Arts]
Fighting Vipers [Sega of America]
Goal Storm [Konami]
Manx T.T. [Sega of America]
Marvel Super Heroes [Capcom]
Mega Man 8 [Capcom]
Mega Man X4 [Capcom]
MVP College Football '96 [Data East]
NBA Hang Time [Williams]
NFL Full Contact [Konami]
Nights (Into Dreams...) [Sega of America]
Panzer General [SS.]
Prime Time Football [Sega]*
Project Overkill [Konami]
Quake [GT Interactive]
Rayman 2 [Ubi Soft]
Scorcher [Scavenger]
Sonic X-Treme [Sega of America]*
Three Dirty Dwarves [SegaSoft]
Triple Play 97 [Electronic Arts]
Virtua Cop 2 [Sega of America]
Virtua On [Sega of America]
ANNOUNCED TITLES
Alien Vs. Predator [Fox]
Castlevania: The Bloodletting [Konami]
Clan Destiny [Virgin]
Contra 32 [Konami]*
Criticom 2 [Vic Tokai]
Dark Savior [Sega of America]
Gen" [Electronic Arts]
Heart of Darkness [Virgin]
Iron Blood [Take 2 Interactive]
Kumite [Konami]
LUNAR: Silver Star Story Director's Cut [Working Designs]
Major Damage [Capcom]
Myst II [Sunsoft]
Roach Racers [SegaSoft]
Terminus [Scavenger]
VR Basketball [Interplay]
VR Football [Interplay]

new
releases

* - Working Title

RECENT RELEASES

AD&D Slayer [SSI]
Battle Arena Toshinden 2 [P 3 , mates]
Bust-A-Move Again [Acclaim]
Creature Shock: Special Edition [Data E sty]
HardBall 5 [Acco ade]
PO'ed [Accolade]
Shell Shock [U S Co]
Slam 'N Jam '96 [C]
Solar Eclipse [Crys]
The Hive [Tr mark]
VR Golf [Interpl]

JUNE 1996

Adidas Power Soccer [Psygnosis]
Beyond the Beyond [Sony CE]
Big Bass World Championship [Hot-B]
Blazing Dragons [Crystal Dynamics]
Buster Bros. Collection [Capcom]
Chronicles of the Sword [Psygnosis]
DarkStalkers: The Night Warriors [Capcom]
Double Dragon [American Technos]
Dream Team Basketball [US Gold]
Fade to Black [Electronic Arts]
Fox Hunt [Capcom]
Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball [Acclaim]
Golden Nugget [Virg n]
High Velocity [Atlus]
Hyper 3-D Pinball [Virgin]
MLB Pennant Race [Sony CE]
Space Hulk [Electronic Arts]
Summer Games [U S Gold]
The Raven Project [Mindscape]
Time Commando [Activsion]
Tokyo Highway Battle [Jaleco]
Triple Play 97 [E ectronic Arts]
VR Baseball [Interplay]

JULY 1996

Bogey: Dead 6 [Sony CE]
Bubsy 3-D [Accolade]
Carnage Heart [Sony CE]
Crime Wave [Domark]
Death Trap Dungeon [Domark]
Formula One Racing [Psygnosis]
Horned Owl [Sony CE]
Impact Racing [JVC]
Iron Blood [Take 2 Interactive]
MVP Baseball [Data East]
Myst [Psygnosis]
Nick Price Golf [W lliams]
Project Overkill [Konami]
Raw Pursuit [JVC]
Rebel Assault II [LucasArts]
Robo Pit [T*HQ]
Shokendo [Ja eco]
SimCity 2000 [Max s]
Star Winder [Mindscape]
Steel Harbinger [Apogee]
Storm [American Softworks]
Tenka [Psygnosis]
The Aquanaut's Holiday [Sony CE]

Top Gun [Spectrum Holobyte]
Wetlands [New World]

AUGUST 1996

3-D Baseball [Crystal Dynamics]
Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain [Crystal Dynamics]
Frankenstein [Interplay]
Namco Museum Volume 1 [Namco]
NFL Legends Football '97 [Accolade]
NHL Open Ice [Williams]
Ripper [Take]
Season of the Wolf [ ]
Shred Fest [ ]
Team 47 Goman [Cot]
VR Pool [ ]
X-Men Children of the Atom [Accla m]

SEPTEMBER 1996

4X4 Gears & Guts [American Softworks]
Area 51 [Williams]
Armed [Interplay]
Breath of Fire III [Capcom]
Casper [Interplay]
Clay Fighter III [Interplay]
Crash Bandicoot [Sony CE]
Darknet [American Softworks]
Pitball [Warner Interactive]
Power Pinball [Bandai]
Powerslave [Playmates]
Red Asphault [Interplay]
Ridge Racer Revolution [Namco]
Sentinent [Psygnosis]
Spot Goes to Hollywood [Virgin]
Syndicate Wars [Bullfrog]
Tecmo Super Bowl [Tecmo]
Tekken 2 [Namco]
The Lost Vikings 2 [Interplay]
Tomb Raiders [U S Gold]
W.E.T. Corpse [Vic Tokai]
Wolf Fang [T*HQ]

4TH QUARTER 1996

Aeon Flux [Viacom New Media]
Air Combat 2 [Namco]
Arc the Lad [Sony CE]
Dark Sun [Data East]
Destruction Derby 2 [Psygnos s]*
Disruptor [Universal Interactive Studios]
King's Field II [Asc i]
Marvel Super Heroes [Capcom]
Mega Man 8 [Capcom]
Mega Man X4 [Capcom]
MK Trilogy [Williams]
Monster Truck Rally [Psygnos s]
Namco Museum Volume #2 [Namco]
NBA Hang Time [Williams]
NFL Full Contact [Konami]
NFL Quarterback Club '96 [Acclaim]
NHL PowerPlay '96 [Virgin]
Return to Zork [Activision]
Robotron 3-D [Wi l ams]
Soul Edge [Namco]
Spider [BMG Interactive]
Wing Commander IV [Origin]
Wipeout XL [Psygnos s]

ANNOUNCED TITLES

Amok [Scavenger]
Angel [Scavenger]
Batman Forever [Acclaim]
Castlevania: The Bloodletting [Konami]
Contra 32 [Konami]*
Criticom 2 [Vic Tokai]
Dark Forces [LucasArts]
Deadly Skies [JVC]
Final DOOM [Wi lliams]
Ghost in the Shell [T*HQ]
Island of Dr. Moreau [Psygnosis]

Jumping Flash! 2 [Sony CE]
Kumite [Konami]
Hyper Blade [Act vision]
Lands of Lore [Virgin]
Major Damage [Capcom]
MVP College Football '96 [Data East]
Myst II [Sunsoft]
Namco Museum Volume #3 [N]
Oblivion [Data n]
POD [ ]
Quake [ ]
Reloaded [ ]
Scorcher [Sc e age]
Star Control III [A]
Terminus [Scavenger]
Toy Story [Disney Interactive]
The 11th Hour [V rg n]
VR Basketball [Interplay]
VR Football [Interplay]
Wayne Gretzky Hockey 2 [Warner Interact ve]

SEPTEMBER

PilotWings 64 [Nintendo]
Super Mario 64 [Nintendo]*

4TH QUARTER 1996

Cruis'n USA [Nintendo]
DOOM 64 [W l ams]
FIFA Soccer '97 [Electron c Arts]*
Killer Instinct 64 [Nintendo]*
Kirby Bowl 64 [Nintendo]*
NBA Hang Time [Wi ams]
Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire [LucasArts]
Super Mario Kart R [Nintendo]*
TetrisPhear [Nintendo]
Top Gun: A New Adventure [Spectrum Holobyte]
Turok the Dinosaur Hunter [Acclaim]
Wave Race 64 [Nintendo]*

ANNOUNCED TITLES

Alien Trilogy [Acclaim]
Area 51 [Williams]
Blastdozer [Nintendo]
Body Harvest [Nintendo]
Buggie Boogie [Nintendo]
Creator [N ntendo]*
Dragon Quest Gaiden [Enix Japan 64DD]*
Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball [Accla m]
GoldenEye 007 [N ntendo]
Hexen 64 [GT Interactive]*
Ken Griffey Jr. Baseball [Nintendo]*
Mission: Impossible [Ocean]
MK3 Plus [Will ams]*
Monster Dunk [Mindscape]
POD [Ubi Soft]
Prey [Apogee]
Quake 64 [GT Interactive]*
Red Baron [Sierra On- ine]
Robotech Academy [Robotech Academy]
Soul Storm [V rtual Hollywood]
Stacker [Virgin Interact ve]
Star Fox 64 [N ntendo]*
Super Mario RPG 2 [Nintendo]
The Legend of Zelda 64 [Nintendo–64DD]*
Wayne Gretzky Hockey [Warner Interactive]*

This list is compiled from various sources including company releases and retail store guides. As such, all titles and dates are subject to change

▶ First attempts by a small development house are always tough, but when inspiration is quoted as being from games like *Super Metroid* and *Yoshi's Island*, you just have to believe that the game will be a winner.

Esoteria 3

Mobeus' 3-D take on Metroid prepares to rock two different worlds at E³

Publisher: TBD

Platform: PC/PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Mobeus Designs

Release: Summer 1996

The life of a small upstart developer is often difficult. No one has heard of you—a situation that is only compounded when none of your employees have ever written a game. Worse yet, your first project will forever define the way that both the general public and the rest of the industry perceives you.

But it is the small developers who often make the most creative games, as they have everything to lose if they put out a turkey. So when IG was approached by the folks at Mobeus Designs to see what they described as "the best-kept secret in the industry," we were both enthusiastic and skeptical. What we saw there was something that truly impressed us: a game called Esoteria 3 that would take elements of a first-person game like Doom and wed them with the puzzle-solving and explo-ration aspects of a game like Metroid.

The story behind Esoteria 3 is a complicated one, but one that science-fiction buffs should find quite appealing. Two thousand years ago, the people of Planet Azeria discovered that their sun would go nova in two millennia, which would effectively destroy all life in their star system. The scientists immediately searched for a new planet for them to colonize,
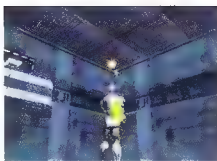
Creating the ideal 3-D platformer

Intelligent Gamer recently spoke with Mobeus Designs' Senior Vice President and Esoteria 3 Co-Designer, Chris [...] [...] just how the company [...] said Esoteria 3.

IG: What were you attempting to accom[...] when you designed Esoteria?

Chris: The way that I like to describe it is that it is reminis-cent of the classic 2-D platform games, like Super Metroid, but in a true 3-D environment. The rea-sons why we chose to put the player out there (on the screen) are to provide a focal point for the player to keep players from getting dizzy or lightheaded, and [...] because the game is very [...] jumping intensive, so that players [...] where they land and [...] [...] them, you go well in [...]. All the collisions are [...] on him right in front of [...], so you can always see [...] jump off cliffs and know exact-ly where you're going to land. So you have more accuracy, and [...] it's probably the biggest [...]

[...] the game units behind the [...] design over nothing looking [...] the pop-up, either. Along with that, it really brings a whole world onto the player computer, allowing for a very [...] experience.

For example, if you jump off a bridge, the enemies will jump off the bridge with you, and you can have these spectacular firefights in the air. We watch a lot of action movies, especially John Woo, and being in third-person, you can see all those lasers flying past your player as you vault over a wall. That's what we're hoping to cre-ate, an intense action feeling, but not a game that is nothing but action.

IG: Describe the overall look and feel of the game.

Chris: Our characters are seri-ous, and the "evil" characters are not unnecessarily menacing. A lot of people put form over function. They want their characters to be scary. We do function over form, where we have an established ci-vilization, with their own military and their own weapons. They

(Esoteria) is reminiscent of classic 2-D platform games, like Super Metroid, but in a 3-D environment.

aren't "bad guys..." sure, they hap-pen to be bad now, but they didn't run out to the "Bad Guy Store" and put some extra horns and spikes on their clothes. We got a lot of influence from Star Wars in that respect, I mean, in that movie, the Imperials didn't look that evil. They are evil because they portray evil, but not just because their uniform makes them scary.

When we first started doing levels, we were doing levels like Doom, and looking at them and say, "Wow, cool level!" I used to be a skater, and we used to skate downtown in buildings that were never meant to be skated in. We used our imagination, and we made it fun. That's what we plan to do in this game. We're design-ing real buildings, real bases, with, say a door right there. But it's locked, so you can't just get in there, you'll need to find another way, by crawling through an air duct, or dodging a series of mov-ing energy fields in a power generator. That's where we cre-ate our obstacles. You don't just make a bunch of platforms that just happen to be moving around, because there is no function for it. I mean, how will the enemies be able to use a building like that? Most games are just arbitrary puzzles, but in our case, we have a real world with realistic obstacles to overcome in order to complete your mission. And if you don't want to do the mission, that's fine too! Go out and do something else, but eventually the mission will need to be completed to progress further into the story. We're not going to put big mazes and obstacles in the game; there will always be an easy way to get wherever you are going. Raven is essentially an assassin, and you'll

but discovered there were no habitable planets within reach of their interstellar technology. That left the people of Azeria only one option: create a habitable planet for them to colonize. And so, for 600 years, the best scientists on the planet worked feverishly on a solution.

Eventually, a breakthrough was made. They created a miniature gravity well, which would seek a stable orbit around a star that would sustain life. The gravity well would then begin to accumulate matter, which, over time, would become enough land for the Azerians to colonize.

As it turned out, it took 1,400 years for the gravity well to accumulate enough matter to sustain life. As the Azerians began to move their citizens to the new colony in transport ships, the scientists discovered that they had slightly less time than they had anticipated. The last message relayed to the colonists on Esoteria 3 was an ambiguous one; it said that the last transports were leaving the system just as the sun exploded, leaving the fate of those aboard an unanswered question.

And so the people who had made it to Esoteria 3 were left to carry on their proud culture. But one man found the power vacuum an easy one to exploit; he seized control of their makeshift government, and ruled Esoteria 3 with an iron fist.

▲ Judging by the looks of this screen alone, with multiple hiding spots and platforms, networked Esoteria 3 has the potential to be fantastic

▲ It looks like a nice piece of flat art, but realize that your computer will make every single faceted polygon come to life in perspective-corrected high-resolution 3-D, assuming that your computer is a Pentium 90 with 16Mb RAM. It's a good thing that prices keep falling.

A product of the government, Raven was created to be the ultimate assassin.

Not all of the colonists were ready to submit, however, and a bloody conflict ensued. But there was one major problem: Since they were just starting out on a new world, the human resource was dangerously low, which made it very hard to recruit an army. So the scientists worked on creating artificial lifeforms that would wage their wars.

The result of one of these projects was Raven, a genetically engineered cyborg killing machine. A product of the government. Raven was created to be the ultimate assassin When the rebel forces discovered the government's secret weapon, an operation was launched to capture him

The success of the rebels' mission caused something that the

▲ The Mobeus Designs development team: (front row, left to right) Andrew Chang, artist; Andrew J. Collins, artist; Min-Hsin (Jennifer) Tsou, programmer; Robert Kovach, art director; Hugh Suk, artist. (middle row) Francois R. Klier, lead programmer; Michael Saladino, programmer; Adam Hayek, lead programmer; Shi-kai Wang, artist; Cuong (Chris) Lai, senior vice president. (back row) Darian Woodford, programmer; James Vu, artist; Terence McGhee, programmer; Geoffrey Y. Leu, producer; Hoang Pham, artist

have to find your way in. Sometimes the direct route is not the easiest way. We'll have objects that you can push and climb on, or push off cliffs onto enemies and whatnot.

IG: Doom and its ilk had a semi-open architecture, whereby the users could create their own levels

to deathmatch on. Will Esoteria have a level editor?

Chris: We are still debating it. We use Lightwave to create our levels, so right now, anyone with Lightwave could create levels for the game. Adam (Mobeus' head programmer) is working on our own editor so that we don't need

to get a license from Lightwave to distribute an editor, which will make it easier for the user to create their own levels. I think the one advantage of our game, but which will complicate things for players, is that now you need a real 3-D program to create the world, not just an overhead map. It would be very hard to create some of the

levels we have in our game in a 2-D editor. Lightwave works well for creating our levels for now, but it is very tedious.

We came up with a new way of loading levels, and preventing pop-up from occurring. I think that

Esoteria will probably hit 1 million polygons for the entire game.

Quake, and most others in the 3-D shooting genre, handle about 2,000 polygons, perhaps more, on a level. Esoteria, on the other hand, will probably hit 1 million polygons for the entire game. Our engine allows us to do things like that, without the confines of loading levels. The reason behind it was the inspiration of Metroid. In that game, you just keep wandering around, looking for the next place to go, until you figure out that you can blast this wall or slip down this hole.

It could be argued that scenes like this are scenes of yet another drab Doom clone, but upon closer examination, it's easy to see that the architectural design is years beyond Doom.
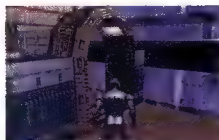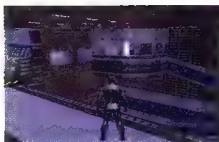
Each area of the game has its own unique feel to it. Camera views are set up so that every step you take has the potential to offer an entirely new point of view

government did not expect. Raven became self-aware. With this revelation, Raven became aware that the government was exploiting him for evil, causing him to align himself with the rebels. And so the game begins.

As Raven, the player must complete various missions, all within the 3-D worldmap of Esoteria 3. Unlike Doom, the levels are fully 3-D, with rooms above and below each other, occasionally with transparent textures that the player can peer through. Another unique feature to the game is the complete lack of predefined levels; the player is free to roam wherever in Esoteria his feet can take him, even if that would take Raven far away from his mission objectives.

The game takes place on what is essentially a floating island, with a fully realized city, sewer system, desert and military base, which is where the game begins. Raven is given unprecedented freedom of movement within this world, with

the ability to jump and crawl wherever he wants. One of the most impressive features of the game engine is the complete lack of "pop-up," even when looking out at the desert from a window inside the military base.

Another thing that sets Esoteria 3 apart from games using a similar concept such as Fade to Black will be the complete control gamers will have over the camera. This will permit players to do things like run in one direction while facing another, strafing enemies who are unfortunate enough to be in the area. The camera system will also allow Raven to make the precision jumps needed in some portions of the game.

The various missions will have multiple paths to completion. While one gamer may prefer to rush in, guns blazing, it may be wiser to sneak around the building, silently

Esoteria 3 has a fully realized sewer system, desert and military base to explore in 3-D.

Extra Features and the Future

IG: What kind of weapons and power-ups will be available for the player to use?

Chris: We'll have a lot of neat items, like different types of bombs, a probe that you can place anywhere in the game and allows you to open a window and view what the probe sees, like a monitoring device. We have a lot of neat ideas... The weapons
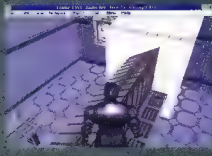
we chose for Raven are similar to the '80s style shooters like R-Type and Raiden: very flashy weapons. Some weapons will have charge gauges. If the player presses the button faster, he'll get rapid fire shots, but each shot will do less damage. He'll

also have a hologram decoy that he can project from his body to draw enemy fire. As for bombs, we are going to have triggered bombs, time bombs and active bombs, which will detonate when an enemy walks over it. We also don't want to confine bombs to the floor; you'll also be able to place bombs on the walls and ceilings. It will be treated as a secondary weapon, which means that you won't have to holster your gun to plant a bomb. We've

The weapons we chose for Raven are similar to the '80s style shooters like R-Type and Raiden: very flashy.

got a lot of neat ideas for items, too, although Raven will only be able to carry one item at a time. We're also going to have "reserve tanks," like Metroid, which will allow you to carry more than your standard 100 percent of health. We're really planning to bring together a lot

of things, both old and new, and put them into this new 3-D format.

We looked at a lot of other games for inspiration, including, surprisingly enough, Yoshi's Island. We thought the idea of a baby that you had to protect was a neat one. So we have one mission where you have to protect a courier. While you are being briefed on the mission, the courier is in his house, and right then and there, the police arrive

to arrest him to take him to the central square. So your mission is to walk around the city, intercept their convoy to rescue the courier and take him back to the rebel base. The thing is, though, he will take damage like any other character, which will force you to jump in the path of a bullet in order to save him. He'll wander off, and put you in dangerous situations. But if you miss him and he is taken away, then you will be sent down an alternate path where you need to break into a database and wipe out the information that he compromised. So the plot will progress in an if-then type fashion.
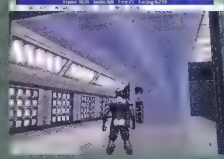
killing guards and slowly but steadily going for the mission objective. The game will have switches that open and close off access to various parts of the level like Doom, but instead of the usual sliding doors, players will also have to contend with things like retracting catwalks and elevators.

Weapons systems and power-ups will be numerous. In the early version shown to IG, Raven was
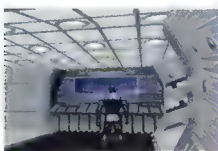
▲ Gameplay elements abound in Esoteria 3, with player interactivity reaching new heights Raven goes to battle with more useful equipment than a football team.

pitching what looked like energy boomerangs at his foes; no deposit, no return Other weapons that will be in the game will be things like mines that will either detonate by time, proximity or when the player chooses to, a camera system that can be placed in a corridor and

monitored through a small window on the game screen and various other knickknacks of destruction. The computer AI is also quite sophisticated; every enemy will have at least three different patterns of attack that will be selected randomly. Enemy soldiers and robots will be placed randomly throughout the game and will team up to get you when they are near each other. In addition, the

▲ Esoteria's developers wanted to make the game as realistic as possible, and in doing so, included many ways for the player to explore without restriction

Enemy soldiers aren't foolish enough to pursue you; they will wait by your last position, team up and ambush you!

soldiers are not foolish enough to pursue you into an ambush; they will wait patiently by your last known position in an attempt to ambush you! Not only that, some of them will even call for backup, so you won't be totally safe hiding around that corner...

The game, as previewed, was not yet optimized, but the target frame rate will be approximately 20 frames per second; impressive, given that every texture-mapped polygon in the game is perspective-corrected. In addition, Esoteria 3

will run in both standard VGA and Super VGA Modes, and have various options the player can set to adjust detail for each machine. The minimum spec will be very steep, however: a Pentium 90 with 16 MB of RAM will be the bare minimum needed to run the game. Esoteria 3 will also support VR goggles, which should make for a truly immersive experience.

Sound effects were barely implemented in the version previewed, although Mobeus is reportedly working closely with a company

that has proprietary technology similar to LucasArts' iMuse system for the spooled digital soundtrack. I was able to hear a brief snippet of the preliminary score, and while it was not overly impressive on the surface, it should sound good as part of a dynamically changing score.

Mobeus is in the process of negotiating a deal with a publisher for the game, which means that some lucky company should be making a big announcement some time soon. Things are looking good however, and if all goes according to plan, Esoteria 3 should be on store shelves this summer. **IG**
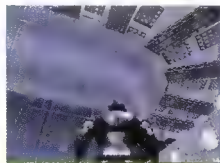
▲ These fully texture-mapped screens are a vast improvement over the early screens we saw Mobeus is truly making strides

Web Site Under Construction
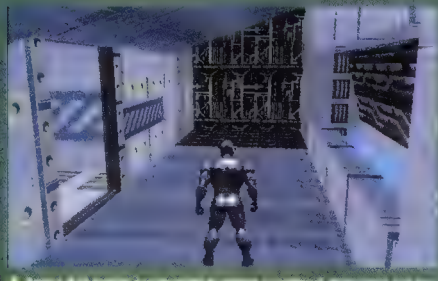
of the main concerns Mobeus designers had when creating Esoteria.

IG: How much NPC interaction will be in the game?

Chris: Right now, there's not as much as we'd like, due to time constraints. But we are planning to include a lot more NPC interaction in the sequel.

IG: What kind of mobility will Raven have?

IG: Will there be a network play option in the game?

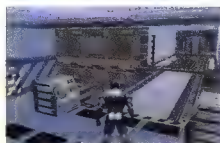**Chris:** Yes, and when you play networked, you'll be able to assume the identity of the enemy, as a robot or an enemy soldier, with their attributes and weapons. We think that will break the monotony of knowing exactly what you have, with all the other players being the same

Chris: Raven will be able to crouch and crawl through air ducts, he'll also be able to swim, run and jump. Right now when you jump, you have a fixed trajectory, but one of the items we plan to add is a gravity belt, which will allow the player to fine-tune those jumps in mid-air. We want the game to be action-oriented, with a strong puzzle-solving element

IG: What are you planning to do as a follow-up to this game?

Chris: We have another team working on an RPG, which will be a cross between the traditional storytelling console RPG and a PC-style RPG. As far as a sequel to Esoteria goes, there are a lot

of things we planned to do in the current game but couldn't do, that we are planning to put into a sequel. We strongly believe that a sequel should be like, quadruple the original game, otherwise it's not really a sequel, but an add-on or something similar. From the company's point of view, this is our first game, and we have to be very careful about it. We don't plan to do the same

We don't plan to do the same game multiple times, like a lot of other small developers.

game multiple times, like a lot of other small developers. That's why the second game will be an RPG, and we're quite excited about that. We're hoping we'll have more stuff to show around Christmas

▶ The fully polygonal dinosaur bones move in three dimensions as Spider (the main character) walks through the scenery of an expansive museum.

Spider

Boss Game Studios' first effort crawls out of the shadows and onto the PS

Publisher: BMG Interactive

Platform: PlayStation/Saturn

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Boss Game Studios

Release: 4th Quarter '96

nterviewed in the March issue of *IG's Fusion*, newcomer Boss Game Studios has finally announced the real title and purpose of its first game. Originally code-named "Adventureland," Spider is an original platform action title which the company promises will cater to the average consumer looking for the right combination of 32-Bit visuals and traditional gaming values.

The game's SGI-rendered introduction tells a bizarre tale of a tentatively named Dr. Kelly's experiments in nanotechnological telepathy: Using high-tech headgear, Dr. Kelly discovers a way to control organisms with his thoughts. One night while working late, Dr. Kelly's offices are attacked by a rival nanotechnology lab—caught in the line of fire, Kelly is shot and his device malfunctions, transferring the doctor's mind into his current project, a cyborg spider, and fusing the device onto Kelly's head.

Seeing no way to remove the

▲ In the fully rendered opening sequence, Doctor Kelly's research lab is targeted by a group of rival nanotechnologists whose devious plans have them looking to steal his cybernetics-controlling visor.

visor without decapitating their victim, the assailants carry the doctor out of the lab, entirely unaware of the visor's effects on its surroundings. Stealing his cache of cybernetic components, the attack team fails to notice that pieces are falling out of the container and

At the player's disposal is an arsenal that would make even Samus Aran jealous.

scattering wherever they walk. Dark mental impulses emanating from the remaining id of the incapacitated doctor cause other cybernetic organisms and robotic objects in the lab to run rampant and escape.

That's where the player takes control of the spider—following a trail of robotic legs, armor and weaponry, the doctor uses the spider's body in order to reclaim his human flesh from the evil technicians at the other lab before they find that his body is no longer

◀ Spider's three-dimensional artwork permits the camera to twist and zoom out as the player moves through a factory full of wooden crates.

worth the trouble. A normal spider is a versatile enough character by itself, but when you add cybernetic implants, you've really got a force to be reckoned with. The title character can cling to walls and repel or swing from inverted surfaces with a strand of webbing, opening up plenty of areas to explore and numerous gameplay possibilities. Also at the player's disposal is an arsenal that would make Samus Aran jealous: The standard weapon is a slash

The levels were designed to be interesting locales for a tiny character to explore.

attack, upgradeable to a slash with a longer reach, with flamethrowers, homing missiles, ice beams and insecticides waiting to be picked up —players will be able to carry two independently controlled weapons at any given time. If you can find extra cybernetic legs, you'll be able to swap out the spider's original legs with more powerful replacements, and the full nature of the leg upgrades is still under development.

Blending traditional 2-D gameplay with a fully 3-D world, players are limited in their exploration by comparison to a game such as

▲ Transparent textures (PlayStation version shown) allow you to see what you're doing as you move through pipes and tubes

corners, dangle from a web to see the area below and move to an overhead perspective in some parts of the game. The goal was to take advantage of 32-Bit technology to create 3-D worlds, but to avoid the sort of boring gameplay moments you experience when finding an empty area of 3-D space.

▲ Cybernetic and robotic enemies will impede your progress- this robotic bee is a polygonal character, as are planned Bosses such as a huge computer-controlled arm. The detailed texture mapping further adds to the realism of each particular area

▲ As the spider tip-toes on the frame of the dinosaur, you can see the detail in his fluidly moving (albeit tiny) limbs.. and later on you can replace them with mechanically enhanced robotic legs

Mario 64 or Floating Runner, but not to the point where exploration is impossible. Most of the action is side-scrolling, but the camera angle rotates and zooms frequently, shifting to change the world's perspective as you crawl around

Spider is divided into six areas, each with four levels and a Boss.

The levels were designed to be interesting locales for a tiny character to explore—you'll experience the splendor of a darkened museum

replete with dinosaur remains and both a small scale-model city and a larger bustling city street, so that players will get to see the world from the perspectives of Godzilla and The Incredible Shrinking Woman Other levels include both the assaulted and evil scientists' labs, a vermin-infested sewer and an automated warehouse full of crates in the throes of production

To give the game a distinctive and realistic look, Spider's visuals rely on specially created textures, animation and predefined camera movements. Textures are dark and detailed throughout, giving Spider a gritty modern look, and transparency effects are used to allow the player to see where he's crawling through objects such as winding pipes The realistic 3-D ani-

mation is a result of motion-capture technology provided by Boss Game Studios' founding father, Boss Film Studios All movement for the main character was motion-captured from an aluminum rod "puppet" wired with sensors to track leg movements and the like, all of which was imported into 3-D design packages including Autodesk 3-D Studio, MultiGen's GameGen software and Alias Powerplay. The other creatures were almost entirely animated by hand, and Spider will have between 15 and 20 enemies, biomechanical and otherwise. IG

http://www.bossgame.com

▶ Utilizing EA Sports' much-hyped "Virtual Stadium", a 3-D benchmark for creating ultra-realistic stadiums, Triple Play offers the most authentic looking stadiums outside of the real thing.
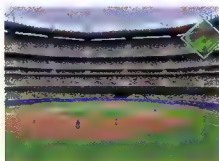
Triple Play
Baseball 97

EA Sports tries to finally create their "John Madden" of baseball sims.

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Platform: PlayStation

Format: 1 CD-ROM

Developer: EA Sports

Release: Summer '96

After stumbling out of the 32-Bit starting blocks by releasing the mediocre PGA Tour Golf, and then scrapping the highly anticipated 32-Bit versions of John Madden Football and NHL Hockey due to "quality concerns," Electronic Arts' grasp on the sports game market began to loosen. Ironically, Triple Play Baseball, the title that was arguably their least popular 16-Bit sports game, is poised to show that EA Sports' 32-Bit lapse was nothing more than a short palpitation.

More or less, the 32-Bit generation of sports games has defined itself with virtual gameplay environments and three-dimensional characters. The competition between these games is no longer based on whether or not they are 3-D, but rather, which uses this presentation model the most effectively.

Triple Play, like most new, next-generation EA Sports titles, utilizes what they have called the "Virtual Stadium." This game engine uses stunningly detailed 3-D stadiums

with prerendered 3-D sprites to represent the characters that are controlled by the player. While this blend of sprites and polygons was not entirely successful for NBA Live, it works wonderfully for Triple Play 97.

Inspired work went into each and every one of Triple Play's "virtual stadiums." From the full-motion video, aerial flyby of each stadium in the beginning of each contest to the multiple, swooping camera angles that reveal the interior of the ballparks, the attention to detail is remarkable. "Lone Star" Texas flags hang from the rafters of the Astrodome, while Wrigley Field's skyline and scoreboard are

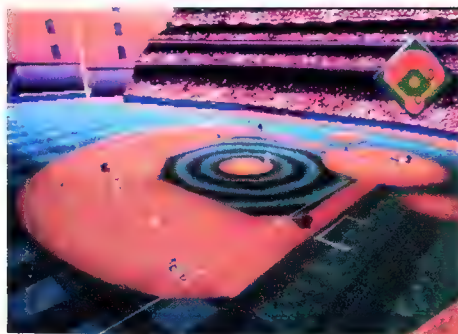of weapons—10 different pitches in all ranging from fastballs of variable speed to wicked screwballs and sinkers selectable by various combinations of button and pad presses. Once the ball is released, it can be partially controlled with the directional pad. Batters can counter with multiple batting stances and swing types. The whole gambit of options can become quite a bit to digest, and thankfully, Triple Play includes three difficulty levels designed to wean gamers through the learning experience.

Triple Play 97 has a variety of features consisting of full-season play, a Home Run Derby and various playoff and series modes.

Triple Play is poised to show that EA Sports' 32-Bit lapse was nothing more than a short palpitation.

▲ Lush, highly realistic rendered stadium graphics contribute to Triple Play 97's overall polished presentation. Camera movement is fluid and scaling is smooth.

unmistakably authentic.

Of course, highly detailed stadiums are just part of the overall presentation. What fills them is doubly important. The games' interface is intuitive and cleanly laid out. Several camera angles are available including three batting angles and four fielding views. None of them are wild or amazing with most of the camera perspectives consisting of gameplay-friendly high, medium, low and reverse-angle views. Complementing the eye-pleasing aesthetics are a chorus of organ tunes and a play-by-play announcer.

The gameplay in Triple Play 97 is nothing extraordinary, although it has a great deal of depth and realism. The standard, third-person, pitcher-versus-batter interface is implemented with important statistical windows sprinkled about the screen with additional base-running windows that pop up when warranted. Pitchers have a variety

There is also a vast amount of current statistics made possible by the acquisition of a Stats Inc. license, which is just one of the many baseball-related licenses included in this title. Most interesting, however, is the Create A Player feature, which allows the user to design a baseball player from the ground up. From aesthetical features to raw talent, any player can give birth to a made-to-order MLB star.

Triple Play 97 may prove to be an unlikely hero for Electronic Arts. It has the potential to plug one of the few holes that has existed in EA Sports' lineup for many years in addition to becoming the catalyst necessary to spark the resurgence of their 32-Bit sports titles.

IG

Combining prerendered character sprites and an isometric perspective, Overkill's main problem is the confusion caused by map designs which occasionally remind you of Escher's most twisted visions.


Project
Overkill

Konami's new Chicago-based R&D facility uses meat-grinder gore to blow you away

Walls become translucent as you approach them, revealing hidden ammo (necessary) and medical kits. Bodies come to litter every inch of the maps.
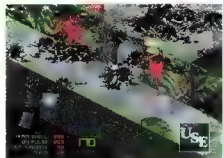
A spooled video rotating 3-D rendered map of Overkill's complex center spins in the top center as a flat mission map and character select appear at the bottom.
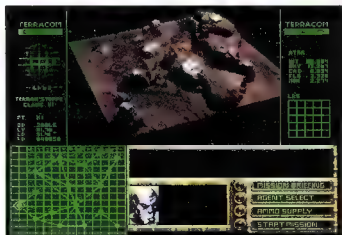
Years ago, Konami was an established player in the 8- and 16-Bit shooter category, releasing classic installments in the arcade and home Contra and Gradius series to anxious audiences around the world. While working as NES developers, the company's console-only Metal Gear—released under their Ultra imprint label—broke new ground by mixing their proven action elements with modern military-style adventure missions, and Konami continued to impress players with its ability to make both popular quarter-sucking arcade titles and deep, long-lasting home games.

Times have changed. Relying on sports games and a handful of promising upcoming arcade conversions to reinforce their 8- and 16-Bit bedrock, Konami is again testing the waters with an original action-adventure game—Project Overkill, a violent fixed-perspective isometric shooter developed by

Project Overkill is Loaded minus some intensity, plus a bit of thinking.

Konami Computer Entertainment in Chicago. Combining the comic book-like character design, gory rendered artwork and game objectives of Gremlin and Interplay's

Loaded with the control scheme (independently controlled walking and gun positioning) of Williams' Smash TV, Project Overkill takes moderate advantage of the PlayStation's advanced graphics technology and delivers adult themes which previously wouldn't have been acceptable in a console game.

Your current weapon and ammo stocks are in the bottom-left corner, health and map to the center and usable item (a human eye for retina scans) in the right.

You control a team of four infiltrators whose outfits and weapons are their primary distinguishing factors, and you're set loose in different futuristic compounds upon a number of missions which fit generally into the "search and destroy" and "locate and escape alive" categories. In Smash TV, for example, your goal was simply continued survival and accrual of money and prizes—bullets never ran out and you often found super-powered guns to make your exploration easier. Unless something changes before the game is released, Overkill's goal is even harsher. One of the four soldiers has to make it through the entirety of a mission alive—no easy feat when you have only very limited ammunition to depend on—and once someone dies, you have one

In open spaces, your gun lays waste to legions of enemy guards, whose bodies fall to the floor with splashes of blood and somewhat disturbing plopping noises

less person to finish the remainder of the tasks ahead.

Each soldier gets four weapons and a sans-ammunition attack (punching or using the butt of your gun), and completion of your missions will force you to bury numerous bullets in the bodies of enemy guards. Project Overkill is Loaded minus a little intensity and plus a little thinking man's gore and action—while it's a traditional "find the key and open the door" sort of game, little touches such as leaving bloody footprints and plucking out guards' eyes for use in retina scanners will surely thrill those weaned on Manson documentaries and futuristic Stallone flicks.

At the moment, Project Overkill is vicious and challenging but—largely because of the fixed perspective and standard gameplay—not significantly more than what one could expect from a CD-based 16-Bit game with rendered character and background artwork. Superb audio effects are a highlight of the unfinished demo we've played, but they stand out especially because of the otherwise routine art and gameplay. Regardless, we're looking forward to seeing where Overkill stands as it comes closer to release. IG

Battles are fought out on wide-spread variously terrained battlefields, similar to previous big-name strategy games such as WarCraft and Command & Conquer.

G-Nome: Dominion

7th Level's new strategy game is gearing up to do battle with C&C

Publisher: 7th Level

Platform: PC

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: 7th Level

Release: June 1996

Since the dawn of Dune 2, Westwood has had more than its fair share of followers. Beginning with Blizzard and their WarCraft title, clones of t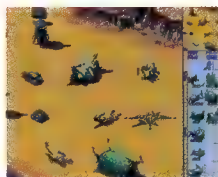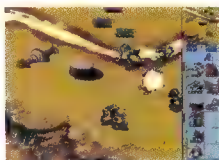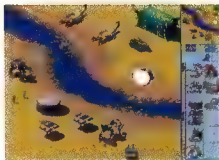he realtime strategy game Command and Conquer are likely to be as prevalent at E³ as clones of the grand-daddy of unoriginality, Doom. Throughout all this lack of creativity, however, 7th Level quietly prepares G-Nome: Dominion, the first of the new-generation C&C clones that not only innovates technologically, but also conceptually. Dominion also marks 7th Level's first foray out of their trademark cartoon looniness to a game on a more serious note. With current colonies bursting at the seams, the government needed to ease the pressure on the already thinly stretched resources available. In a bold move similar to the Oklahoma Land Rush, the government declared the Phygos system open for habitation. Aware of the potential skirmishes that might result from such a decree, the government looked away from the Phygos system. Now, four races seek control of this resource-rich solar system: the tentacle-endowed Scorps, the jack-of-all-trades Humans, the squatty-yet-sturdy Darkens and the Merc pirates. Players start out on a planet suited for their race's particular features. The Darkens thrive on the inner volcanic worlds of Phygos, the Mercs prefer the frigid outer worlds and the Humans and the Scorps vie for the Earth-like worlds in the middle of

With over 95,000 frames of animation powered by 3D Studio, Dominion's graphical appeal is of the highest quality, besting most of the flood of recent strategy games.

Ever since games like WarCraft began to gain mass appeal, more and more strategy "clones" have been appearing on the market. Is this the next "Doom" epidemic?

the system. From these planets begin 25 mission campaigns to conquer Phygos. Conquering one world leads to the next, this time with a seasoned battle veteran swelling the player's ranks, a concept akin to the heroes of Master of Magic. Throughout each of the campaigns, players will lose control of worlds already conquered and have to reclaim them, while worrying about the other planets that lie ahead in the campaign. Like most games of this genre, Dominion's story is more of a sidenote than anything else. The action is intense, featuring 24 buildings for each of the races, as well as 19 military units, ranging from hover tanks to huge quadrupedal robots. Each race also comes equipped with a map-obliterating super weapon, ready to be unleashed upon unsuspecting opponents. Dominion is as much research driven as other, more resource-intensive games. Like the story, a resource management layer of gameplay underlies the game's hardcore action. Dominion's gameplay is strong, but so is its aesthetic appeal. Carrying with it an approximate 95,000 frames of 3D Studio rendered animation, Dominion not only looks better than any other similar game on the market at this point, but moves better as well. Each of the units

were modeled and animated by hand, giving one of the most original mechanical menageries to date. Touted by 7th Level as the first "true Windows 95" title, Dominion integrates and takes full use of all of the DirectX APIs developed by Microsoft.

As a result, Dominion can be played in resolutions as high as 1280x1024 and up to eight players can compete over an Internet connection, LAN or modem. The last of, and possibly the most promising of, Dominion's features is 7th Level's commitment to product support. Instead of releasing new missions on CDs every month, Todd Porter, lead designer of the G-Nome games and industry super veteran, believes that players should be given more "bang for their buck," as opposed to having to succumb to a marketing

G-Nome: Dominion is as much research driven as other, more resource-intensive games.

machine for further gratification. As a result, Dominion will come bundled with 7th Level's own Windows-based level editor and have access to new levels online. The crowning achievement, however, is a contest in which players submit ideas for a fifth race. The winning race will then be rendered and animated accordingly, and released as a free add-on for Dominion through the Internet. **IG**

http://www.7thlevel.com/

▶ Beautiful graphics and large, highly detailed three-dimensional worlds add to the splendor of Sega's most dynamic new title since the original Sonic the Hedgehog.
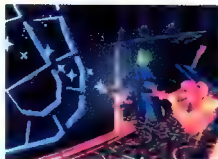
Nights
Into Dreams...

Credited with designing Sega's Sonic the Hedgehog, a character which almost single-handedly came to symbolize the swift pace of the company's capture of the 16-Bit games market, Yuji Naka faded out of active participation in the Genesis, Game Gear and 32X Sonic series games some time ago. As the next man in line behind Sega's Yu Suzuki
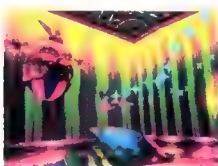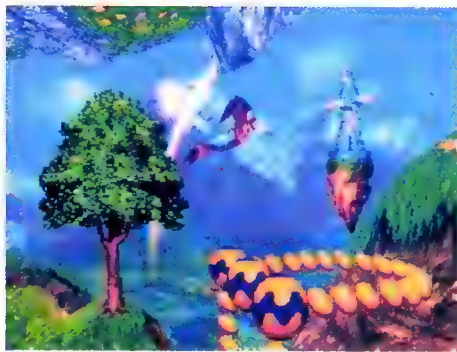
▲ The stars that follow you are known as "Ideya," which come in five different colors, the fifth and most rarest is the Red Ideya, the symbol of courage

to assume Sega's "master game creator" title, Naka and his Sonic Team have been working quietly for many months on Nights, a title which Sega is internally calling their best shot at winning over the jaded gaming press during the upcoming holiday season.

Oddly enough, despite the fact that Sonic became Sega's international mascot and one of its biggest licensing and gaming draws, its creator moved away from the character as it spawned a multitude of sequels and has little to no involvement in either Sega Technical Institute's Sonic X-treme (see E³ Preview this issue) or Travelers' Tales new Sonic title for the Genesis. Instead, Naka opted to design an entirely new set of quirky characters and a solid, competent 3-D graphics engine for the Saturn, both of which will doubtlessly charm the socks off of players.

The story of Nights is as deep as one could conceive, yet still imaginative enough to charm both younger and older players alike. Set in the world of dreams, two teenagers stumble upon Nights, a devil who betrayed his evil master because of his desire to be free. Upon being freed, Nights discovers that the two children bear the one trait that is extremely rare in the land—that of courage. With that in mind, the three travel together throughout the world of dreams to defeat Nights' former master, the evil Wiseman and restore peace to the land of Nightopia.

There are definite similarities between Sonic X-treme and Nights, but Sega's internal developers believe that Night—perhaps moreso than Sonic—could actually prove a challenge for Nintendo come late September. Despite their quiet admissions that neither the unusual Nights characters nor Saturn technical specs can compare with the sheer established clout of the Mario character and the new hardware features (anti-aliasing, perspective correction, MIP-mapping) that the Nintendo 64 has built in, the developers note that Nights has that special "magical" quality that grips players from the first moment they set their hands upon the controller.

The achievement of the "magic" comes from Sonic Team's concept that two things restrict the quality of gameplay in three-dimensional games: gravity and full unrestricted freedom to explore bland worlds. When you have gravity in a 3-D game—as witnessed in Floating Runner, Jumping Flash and even

DOOM—successfully placing yourself after a jump requires a high degree of controller mastery. Nights deals with this by giving the player three-dimensional freedom of movement in flying stages, wherein the character leaves behind a brilliant set of flashing stars and flies through hoops.

There are also limited three-dimensional exploration portions of the game and "on rails" scenes where the camera moves around the player three-dimensionally in what is in essence a two-dimensional plane. If the terminology seems confusing, think back to Sega's Virtua Fighter series, where characters always fight on a straight line despite the fact that the background artwork and char-

acters move in 3-D—the same concept will be applied to some of the gameplay in Nights.

Using what today is only a mock-up of the final product, Sega has intended Nights for full compatibility with their new Analog Control Pad, which in prototype stages resembles a hacked-up version of the current Saturn controller with the thumbpad replaced with a newly elevated and especially pressure-sensitive joypad. Considering that Sonic isn't slated to use analog controls and Mario 64 definitely will, it will be most interesting to see where comparisons are drawn and whether the more hardware-demanding product (Nights) can out-do Sonic X-treme, Sega of America's flagship game for 1996... **IG**

Sonic's creator re-emerges to go head to head with Mario 64

Publisher:	Sega of America
Platform:	Saturn
Format:	Single CD-ROM
Developer:	Sonic Team
Release:	4th quarter '96
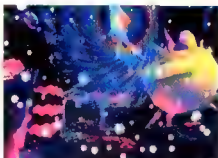
▲ Nights' array of graphical effects is truly astounding, with large, detailed characters and loads of bright, vibrant objects flooding the screen many times throughout the game

Sega's developers believe that Nights could actually prove a challenge for Nintendo come late September.

▶ Square's first step away from Role Playing Games has a viewpoint similar to that of Toshinden or Zero Divide. The question of gameplay has yet to be answered...

Tobal
No. 1

With the RPG world already in their grasp, Square sets out to conquer fighters

Publisher: Square of Japan

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Dream Factory

Release: July 1996 (Japan)

▲ Lighting effects look similar to Tekken 2, but character shadows are notably blocky and texture mapping is (so far) of fairly low quality

There are two stories which will undoubtably be ringing in the minds of Square Soft fans after hearing about Tobal No. 1, the company's first one-on-one fighting game. The first story has to do with the company's abrupt change in development and the second is the full story line behind their most unusual project to date.

Square's departure from Nintendo's third-party developer ranks followed their ascendance to a level of status almost unknown in Japan: Their Final Fantasy RPG series had grown to eclipse even Enix's vaunted Dragon Quest games, and both their Secret of Mana and Chrono Trigger titles had debuted to great media acclaim and public excitement. After working with Nintendo to develop Super Mario RPG, a product that has the potential to break through in even the notoriously RPG unfriendly U.S. youth market, Square simultaneously left Nintendo to join Sony as a CD publishing house and provided the media with screen shots of their first PlayStation title, Final Fantasy VII. The Japanese public now ranks the new Final Fantasy game as their unfettered number-one most wanted title for 1996.

But along with their abandonment of Nintendo came a change in the company's internal strategy. Free of the "Nintendo-brand RPG maker" shackles they had worn for many years, Square decided to formally pursue new business avenues. Having announced sequels to two of their most popular RPGs and a new strategy Final Fantasy game, Square decided to release their first 3-D fighting game, Tobal No. 1.

▲ Early screens look nice, although character graphics aren't yet up to par with the fighters of Tekken or Virtua Fighter 2.

The premise is unique and as bizarre as one might expect. Akira Toriyama, Japan's acclaimed designer of the characters from the Dragon Quest games, Dragon Ball Z and Chrono Trigger, also created Tobal's cast of fighters. In another region of our galaxy hovers Tobal, a planet orbited by 10 moons and the region's king, an alien creature who just happens to love martial arts and fighting. When humans come to explore Tobal, they discover the one thing that every scientist since the dawn of time has been looking for: A limitless source of energy, which the King of Tobal doesn't mind sharing...so long as the humans are

Dream Factory's team appears to have the name recognition and experience it will need to win.

willing to provide him some entertainment. As the King loves martial arts and sees great potential in the human fighters, he opens the "Tobal No. 1" tournament, which as the Japanglish name only hints is a contest to see which person is Tobal's number-one warrior.

In development by Dream Factory, a new Japanese development house created just for this game, Tobal No. 1 appears set to take Toriyama's artwork into the third dimension that Bandai—publisher of numerous 2-D Dragon Ball Z fighting games—may not be ready to tap. Consisting of four former Virtua Fighter team members, two Tekken members, one VF and Tekken staffer and one Soul
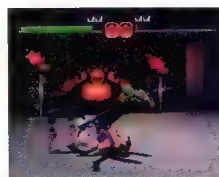
▲ Background images are highly detailed, although at press time it was still undetermined as to whether or not the player will be able to interact with them in any way.

Edge team member, Dream Factory's developing team appears to have at least the name recognition and experience it will need to win the public's early confidence. Judging by these early screen shots, which demonstrate just how nicely Toriyama's distinctive style translates into polygonal artwork, Tobal No. 1 has a real shot at working both Asian and North American audiences into a frenzy.

Using a 3-D graphics engine which combines Toshinden-esque polygonal background art with VF-style polygonal characters, Tobal No. 1's approach will likely yield fluid animation and frame rates. Though the title may not appeal to hardcore MK or KI fans, the style is intended to impress the legions of Manga and Anime fans concentrated in Asian markets and growing elsewhere in the world.

▶ Reasonably paced hockey action is made impressive via the use of detailed, fluidly animated polygonal characters and (on the PS/Saturn) a user-defined camera.

NHL PowerPlay '96

Virgin's best sports title to date blasts past competitors on three formats

Publisher: Virgin

Platform: Saturn

Platform: PlayStation/PC

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Radical

Release: 2nd Quarter '96

▲ Extreme zoom-outs and close-ups are equally realistic—even the goalie's body, entirely polygonal, is believable up close.

Criticisms of Sega's NHL All-Star Hockey for the Saturn began last year when the high expectations generated by prerelease screenshots were not met by the actual game in motion. As a hockey game, NHL All-Star had options and big characters, but lacked the pure excitement and visual fluidity that a game of this genre should deliver. Virgin's NHL PowerPlay takes many positive steps toward creating a hockey game that is as fun and exciting as EA's NHL Hockey and even Sony's NHL FaceOff, sporting more options than any other hockey game on a console system to date.

Including NHL and NHLPA licenses, PowerPlay contains all 26 actual NHL teams, two all-star teams and 17 international teams, each with somewhat up-to-date rosters.

There's a single downside to the graphics in NHL PowerPlay: A single moving camera option (PC, Saturn and PS versions) and user-configurable fixed-angle camera (PS and Saturn versions only) could have been better handled. In the PC version, there is one view during gameplay—a three-fourths overhead view similar to EA's NHL Hockey. Though this is perhaps the best view you could play any hockey game from (as it allows you to see most of the action on the ice in the correct proportions), it's your only choice on the PC.

On the bright side, the players are polygon-based, and they're complex enough that the polygons are only noticeable during close-ups in instant replays and goal-scoring zoom-ins. Motion-captured character animation is superb: When your players get body checked, they don't just fall on the ice—they often sail through the air

and spin on the ice before returning to a standing position. On the replay camera, you can zoom, pan or wander, even into extreme close-ups of players' bodies and faces, which don't look half bad.

The sound effects, although incomplete in the version we tested, promise an experience

▲ Character jerseys look great even when the camera moves in to show the face-off, however the floor gets a bit pixelized

undelivered in any hockey game to date. The addition of an announcer adds tremendously to the gameplay experience: The rush of adrenaline you'll get after completing a breakaway, scoring and then hearing the announcer say "Philadelphia goal, number 88, Errrric Lindros" is incredible.

Another area in which PowerPlay excels is in gameplay options—your variety of choices is quite nice. There are four modes of gameplay to choose from: Quick Start, which lets you pick two teams and play a quick game, Exhibition, which is like Quick Start, just with more options to choose from; Tournament, which is limited to international teams and finally, there is a Full Season Mode, which allows you to pick an 11-, 21-, 42- or full 84-game season, as

well as best of 1, 3, 5 or 7 playoff series.

For those more into simulations, PowerPlay includes a Coaching Mode, which like FIFA Soccer allows you to pick strategies for different gameplay situations. Additionally, the buttons on the controllers are maximized for simulation-style control—on the Sega control pad, for example, all eight buttons do something different. From slapshots to wristshots, from Poke Checks to Body Checks, from speed boost to skate backward, the buttons are all there, giving you almost complete control over your players' activities.

However, the true measure of any hockey game is the gameplay, and at this early stage, NHL PowerPlay needs a little bit more work. It moves rather slowly for a hockey game—faster than Sega's NHL All-Star Hockey, but still not as exciting or speedy as EA's NHL Hockey and Sony's NHL FaceOff. Pacing is definitely more on the simulation side than arcade side, and the flow of the game is affected by the realistic controls. Most players are on the slow side, mak-

Great graphics and in-game speech give Virgin a real shot at the 1996 "best hockey game" award.

ing it very difficult at times to quickly change directions, fool the goalie and score on breakaways.

Virgin is taking several steps in the right direction toward creating a hockey game that is full of options and fun to play. If the speed and control can be tweaked, the audiovisual engines currently in place will make PowerPlay a sure-fire winner in '96. IG

http://www.vie.com/

AND ON THE 8TH DAY, HE SPLIT TO MAUI, AND LEFT YOU IN CHARGE.

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to feed the fish.

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PLANES, HEAVEN AND HELL,
SIMULTANEOUSLY.

KEEP SOULS HAPPY BY
PROVIDING THEM WITH THE
REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS
THEY EXPECT, LIKE **O**

DISASTERS INCLUDE
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INTRODUCING Afterlife.™
THE LAST WORD IN SIMS.

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A half-dozen disasters, every problem, but keep
headaches on the plane. Conquer fire, the get compli-
cated task. With over 20 in a carefully rendered terrain,
over 300 detailed tiles and buildings, and loads more
graphs and charts than you can shake a process, it
you're in for infinite hours of gameplay.

▶ Capitalizing on the success of the Sim series, SimCopter expands on the idea in a unique fashion—exploring your cities from above in your own copter. It's all the same builder characteristics coupled with the action of helicopter flight
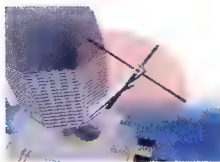
SimCopter

Maxis expands the value of their older SimCity 2000 save files with a fun new 3-D helicopter simulation

Publisher: Maxis

Platform: Windows 95

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Maxis

Release: Second half '96

Long known for their wildly successful Sim series, which started in 1989 with SimCity and has since been followed by a variety of other simulations from SimTower to SimEarth, Maxis is now starting to branch out into different genres. One of the first products of their new approach will be SimCopter, a remarkable idea which takes your saved cities from SimCity 2000, translates them into textured terrain maps, then lets you fly a helicopter around your own cities completing a variety of "crisis management" missions. For those who may not already have a number of SimCity 2000 cities ready to go, SimCopter also comes equipped with a number of predesigned locales.

There are two different play modes for SimCopter. The first is the User Gameplay Mode, in which you feed the software one of your SimCity 2000 saved games, and it spits out a series of missions based on the characteristics of your city. For instance, if you had a city with a high crime rate, you might end up spending your time chasing
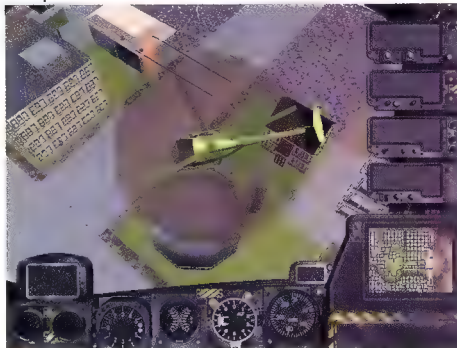
▲ Three-dimensional graphics add spice to the cities you've built in Maxis' SimCity 2000, providing you the ability to roam around urban areas with considerable freedom to explore their new landscapes. Auto-generation of additional terrain lets you move beyond city limits.

▲ Crisis management is the primary mission in SimCopter. Rather than building more cities, players may find themselves literally putting out fires or chasing down the criminal element much of the time.

criminals at night with a high-powered spotlight. In a different city, you might spend your time carrying large buckets of water to help put out burning buildings.

The second mode is the Career Mode. This mode only makes use of the predesigned cities, but takes advantage of this by putting together a coherent sequence of missions, and giving you the opportunity to pursue a real career spanning multiple cities. Successful missions earn money to help outfit

your copter with various technological toys, or even to buy a completely new helicopter. (There are a few progressively more advanced ones available during the game.)

Actual play is action-oriented, without too much emphasis on

Missions allow you to chase down criminals with a spotlight or carry buckets of water to put out fires.

stark realism—for instance, hitting a building does not result in an instantaneous and fiery demise, but does occur with solid attention to detail. Controls are designed to be pretty simple and easy to use, so that players can focus on exploring their cities and completing the missions. There are a number of different viewing angles, most of them adjustable, including a primary Behind the Helicopter view to a Top view (useful for fine positioning) and an Inside the

Cockpit view. It is even possible to land the helicopter and get out to walk around. As with most games of this type, the map is shaped like a torus (if you go off one side, you come back on the opposing side), but as there is an ample area of "no man's land" surrounding the actual map of your city, there is some room for exploring terrain around the city. The maps don't feel restrictive.

As with a number of recent textured games, the frame rate can be adjusted by changing the distance between yourself and the horizon line. However, rather than simply cutting objects off at the horizon, SC uses a nice fog effect to prevent annoying popup. If you want to raise the frame rate, you can simply bring the fog in a little closer. Great features are sure to make this a major hit at E3. **IG**

http://www.maxis.com/index.html

Mindwarp

Maxis surprises with a fast and furious 3-D shooting game–a departure from their usual lineup of "Sim-" titles

Publisher: Maxis

Platform: PC

Format: 1 CD-ROM

Developer: Maxis

Release: 2nd half 1996

Magno

GBUG

12 feet long
17 foot wingspan

▲ Your enemies in the world of Mindwarp are unique in that they interact not only with you, but also with the environment and each other.

Mindwarp represents two breaks from tradition for Maxis: It is not related to their line of Sim products, and it is an action game. In fact, it is a highly original sci-fi action game, taking place in the twisting tunnels of the Mindwarp, an alien world into which you have been brought to decide the fate of humanity. You're forced to deal with various biological creatures and Central Nervous System Machines, as well as the reactions of the organic Mindwarp itself to your actions. Your mission is to go through the various episodes finding all the Dream Fragments, ultimately allowing you to 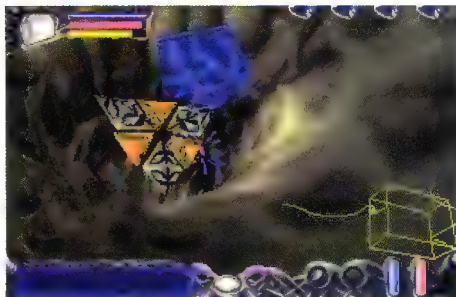escape the Mindwarp. The game is non-linear, allowing you to choose (to a certain degree) where you want to go and when, and Maxis has incorporated a number of other elements in order to bring in a certain amount of strategy to spice up the action.

▲ Mindwarp takes you on a "Fantastic Voyage" through an alien lifeform with other biologicals, and the Mindwarp's own nervous system attempting to keep you from your ultimate objective to find all the Dream Fragments.

textured obstacles that get in your way, from generic rocks to twisted stone columns to translucent crystals, and the game is not restricted to tunnels: There are rooms with everything from moving platforms to chasms to jumps. There are

well, and move quite nicely, with smooth motion of various parts of the body where appropriate. It seems that each new textured game recently has had at least one elegant and distinctive graphical touch, and Mindwarp is certainly

The game is non-linear, allowing you to choose (to a certain degree) where you want to go and when.

Mindwarp is a first-person textured action game which does not fit into any of the stereotypical categories of this genre: It is not a Doom clone, a Descent clone, nor a racing game. In some ways, it is a bit reminiscent of STUN Runner; you move along the walls of primarily circular tunnels, often at high speeds, and often shooting things. However, as one would expect from a modern game, Mindwarp is much more involved: It is not a rail-based racing game, but rather allows you full freedom of motion; the creatures have detailed AI and each behave in their own way; there are a variety of

options to put a rear view in the lower left of the screen, and/or a short range automap in the lower right.

The graphics are mostly quite good. The texturing engine is fully 3-D, and the textures themselves are low contrast and mostly do a good job of avoiding pixelization. There is plenty of variety in the textures, with different areas looking very distinctive—the variety in shapes and types of obstacles only add to the effect. The round tunnels have enough polygons to effectively avoid appearing at all blocky, as do most of the objects in the game. Enemies are textured as
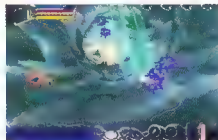
▲ One of the more spectacular graphical effects in Mindwarp is the transparency effect used for the crystals in the tunnels

no exception. One of the more impressive ones is the way the crystals in certain tunnels look: You can see through them to what lies behind, and everything behind them appears with a bluish tint.

Aside from the Dream Fragments, there are three categories of objects to collect: energy power-ups, weapons and special ability power-ups. There are four

different types of energy, with yellow energy governing weapon systems, blue energy for shields, red energy for special maneuvers (such as sliding left and right or jumping) and white energy to maintain your lifeforce. There is a variety of additional weapons, including: Hornets, dumbfire missiles which fire in pairs; Hydra Clusters, triplets of explosive balls which are fired

deployed to the front as well as the rear (for use when executing a fighting retreat) and the Plague Missile, a truly apocalyptic weapon. Special ability power-ups include a turbo boost power-up and a power-up which widens your angle of view, allowing you to see more of the action at any given time and respond more appropriately.

Probably the most unique

The most unique aspect of Mindwarp is the intricate way in which enemies interact with their environment.
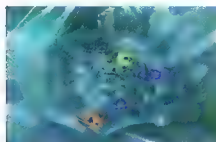

▲ The tunnels in the game are comprised of enough polygons to appear circular, and the textures are varied and colorful

together, break apart on impact and then bounce around the tunnels for a while until hitting a target, Mines, which are exactly what they sound like, and may be

aspect of Mindwarp is the intricate way in which the enemies interact with each other, the environment and you. There are a number of different enemies which differ not only in their weapons and toughness, but also in how they behave and how they are best dealt with. The comprehensive range of behaviors is especially impressive— biological creatures in the first episode are Raptors, Krill, Luciform, Mantaform and Arachnophore, and when killed, they provide red energy for you to collect.

Each episode is a set of interconnected tunnels, but with a few
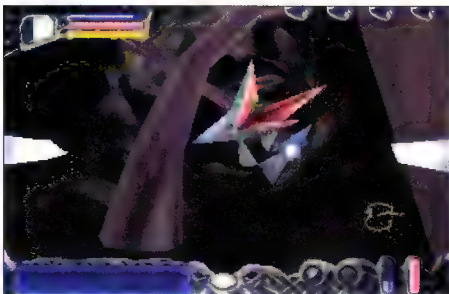
distinct areas (often with different texturing schemes) sometimes separated by teleporters or force fields which must be deactivated. The episodes themselves are non-linear, allowing you to choose which you want to complete whenever you want to complete it. Enemies in the later episodes will have even more variety: Some creatures will have to be befriended and protected in order to complete your mission. Variety even within episodes includes areas such as the Gauntlet, where you must make your way past a number of obstacles and creatures while

being chased by a Disruptor, and there are also areas with greatly reduced gravity fields.

The first episode will be made available for download as shareware when it's ready, and it will also be distributed on a CD with other Maxis demos. Mindwarp will be a featured Maxis game at E3, and is slated for commercial release during the second half of 1996. **IG**

http://www.maxis.com /products/mindwarp /index.html

Strange Creatures

Raptors are tough two-legged creatures that run around a lot but don't tend to be particularly hostile. They'll get in your way and push you around, but won't attack unless you either shoot at them or (presumably) unknowingly enter their lairs. However, once one becomes hostile, all of the other raptors in the area will support their comrade in attempting to kill you. Finally, raptors will go after red energy too, so if you kill something, you have to hurry to beat out any raptors that may be in the area if you want to pick up the energy left behind. Krill are small, fast-moving creatures which won't bother you much unless they happen to be travelling in a large pack. When in packs, the Krill will also hunt and eat any lone Luciform they may encounter. Luciform, in contrast, won't bother you very often, but will kill any lone

Krill they can find. Mantaform, closely related to Luciform, are somewhat tougher and more consistently aggressive. Arachnophore, colorful, tentacled creatures, are mostly too skittish to be dangerous, much preferring flight to battle. However, they have developed the unique ability to harvest blue energy from the Mindwarp itself, so if you are in need of blue energy, hunting down an Arachnophore can be beneficial.

The Central Nervous System (CNS) Machines in the first episode are Sentries,

RAPTOR
10 tons
Jaws like razors
16 feet long
Triple-Jaw

Sentinels, Spikers and Disruptors. The CNS Machines leave yellow energy when destroyed. Sentries and Sentinels are perhaps the most generic enemies in the Mindwarp; taloned, ring-shaped hovering patrollers of the Mindwarp, they'll both shoot on sight, with the Sentinels both doing more damage and being harder to eliminate (but naturally providing more yellow energy when destroyed). Spikers are distracting enemies in the game: Attacking by collision, simple contact can temporarily block out your view of action, but worse, Spikers can also steal items on contact, either weapons or Dream Fragments. If

POPSUCK
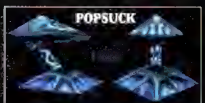
they steal an object, you can get it back only by hunting down and killing the Spiker. If the Spiker only steals a weapon, this may be a judgment call, but if the object was a Dream Fragment, you'll have no choice but to track the culprit and retrieve the Fragment. Finally, Disruptors are the all-purpose nasties. When dormant, they are small balls of electricity which don't do you any harm. However, when, for one reason or another, they decide to put some pressure on you, they will expand until they fill the entire corridor and then start to roll after you. They are indestructible, and their touch will kill you. They accomplish a variety of tasks, from making sure you're not wasting too much time in completing your quest, to simply following behind you to ensure that you can't backtrack.

An interaction scene gives you a box full of options (U.S. version will thankfully have English text) to choose from and some pleasant art to stare at.

Revelations:
Devil
Summoner

Atlus considers bringing U.S. gamers a rare treat: an RPG that caters to adults

Publisher:	Atlus
Platform:	Saturn
Format:	Single CD-ROM
Developer:	Atlus
Release:	Undetermined

▷ The DDS-NET bulletin board is an invaluable resource of information. It's here that you first hear from the mysterious "Redman."

Editor's Note:
Currently, the release of Devil Summoner in the U.S. is on temporary hiatus, as Atlus is instead preparing the PlayStation addition to the Revelations series, entitled "Persona." If Saturn sales continue to rise however, the company will re-evaluate the viability of releasing the game stateside, and in doing so, prepare for a 1st quarter 1997 release.

Among the many Japanese games largely ignored by the mainstream media are the Megami Tensei RPGs by Atlus, which are perhaps the most deserving of coverage. While not having the broad-based appeal of Final Fantasies and Dragon Quests (in other words, kids won't buy them), they are still sellers of the Top10 caliber, enjoying widespread popularity among older gamers and very high scores from traditionally harsh Japanese gaming publications. Famous manga artists such as CLAMP (Rayearth, X1999) are known to be big fans of the MegaTen series.

What sets this series apart from other RPGs is a unique blend of myth and modern technology. Computers play a crucial role in the MegaTen universe, which began as a novel by Nishitani Aya. The main character of the novel,
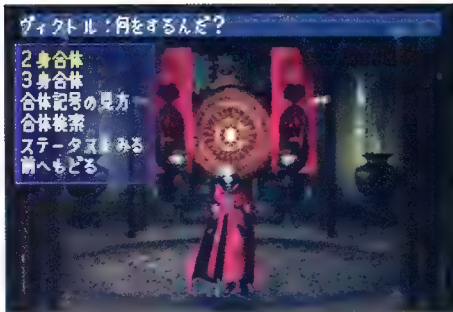
The anime in Revelations: Devil Summoner is of high quality, but will most likely appeal to an older, more mature audience. Titles like this one will surely attract many new lookers into the ever-increasing RPG market, if only given the proper publicity and marketing.
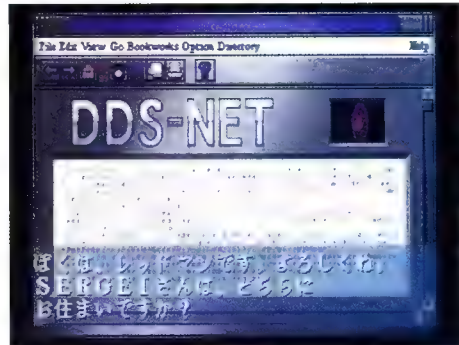
similar to computer science" and that "the pioneer computer scientists also knew, or even practiced the Kabbala very well." Nakajima's talents enabled him to write a program that allowed him to summon demons through his laptop. He explained that with the speed of the computer, complex procedures and rituals of summoning can be performed precisely and in very short periods of time.

DDS-NET

SERGEI

Nakajima Akemi, an ingenious computer programmer and a mystic, held an opinion that the Kabbalistic theories are very

To summon a "digital devil" from another dimension, an element called "magnetine" (usually abbreviated as MAG) is needed—

the more powerful the creature that you want to summon, the more MAG is needed. To maintain their existence in the human world, the demons need a supply of MAG, or else they will lose their life energies and die. After you are done with whatever you ordered the demons to do, you can return them to their dimension or store them in your computer for future use. The game uses arm-terminals,

Even famous manga artists in Japan are known to be big fans of the Megami Tensei series.

handy portable computers that have a variety of functions, such as summoning, communication with the demons, dungeon mapping, etc.

Since the overwhelming majority of MegaTen games were for Nintendo systems, it is no surprise that they never saw the light of day in English-speaking markets— Nintendo's censors, who banned crosses from Castlevania games, would have had a heart attack 10 minutes into any Megami Tensei title. The appearance of CD-ROM-

based game systems, however, has made it possible for companies to experiment with the release of such risky titles without risking financial ruin, and thus we see this, the latest game in the series. If released in the U.S., the game will be called Revelations Devil Summoner.

Unlike its predecessors, Devil Summoner is very impressive graphically, blending traditional first-person exploration with excellent FMV intermissions and prerendered views. The battle scenes, while not as mind-blowing as one may have hoped for, are still miles above any Super NES/Genesis fare. In all truth, DS's graphics, topnotch story and sophisticated game engine make it the only RPG for any system that can lay a claim to being a true step up from old-fashioned RPGs.

The beginning has your character logging onto a bulletin board called DDS-NET, where you input your name, codename, address,

▲ The horrific overtones in Devil Summoner may remind some gamers of Capcom's PlayStation thriller Resident Evil

mansion in the most expensive neighborhood) calls you to meet her at the usual place, a tea house at the town's seaside area

When you meet her there, she says she needs to borrow a book from the library, so you go to the

lines of Wizardry, Dungeon Master or the original Phantasy Star. What sets Devil Summoner apart from and above those games is the sophisticated combat interface, which deserves to be described in some detail. The enemy encounters are semi-random, in that you have an encounter probability indicator, which changes color depending on the area you are in. However, the main difference from other RPG games is that an encounter doesn't have to end in a fight.

Instead, you can use the talk command and try to negotiate with the entities that you encounter. The results vary—the creature may join your party, give you money/
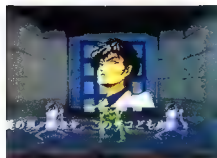
entities can only be obtained by visiting the Goumanden (loosely translated as the place where demons are tamed) and combining several entities into one. Experimenting with various combinations is another essential part of the gameplay.

When it comes to longevity, this is probably the hardest console RPG ever to hit these shores. Aside from experimenting with various entities, you'll have to navigate extremely difficult multilevel dungeons with unexpected warp zones and various traps (auto-mapping is a life saver). Unless Atlus lowers the difficulty for the U.S. release, 60 hours is the absolute fastest time

What sets Devil Summoner apart from other RPGs is a blend of myth and modern technology.

occupation and other things. After you register as a user, you receive e-mail from someone called "Redman," who tells you a few things about the town you are living in. From conversations between your character and other people you learn that you are a recent college graduate, thinking about graduate school. Then your girlfriend Kumiko (from a very wealthy family living in the biggest

library with her. She gets the book, which is about the ancient Japan ruled by "magicians" and "sorcerers," and then mentions Professor Azuma here, a known scholar of the occult at her college. Try to be nice to her, since your ability scores depend on your answers.

When you arrive at the Yarai Ginza's concert hall, strange creatures start showing up out of the blue. You are scared, but all of a

▲ Map scenes (Japanese version shown) take advantage of the Saturn's realtime 3-D polygon rendering abilities to provide rotating and zooming scenery. Simple shapes and shading make it possible to put many buildings on screen at once.

MAG, or laugh insultingly. There is a lot of variety in the conversations, with the entities separated

When it comes to longevity, this is probably the hardest console RPG ever to hit these shores.

▲ Atlus has opted to go heavier on text than some of their predecessors in the RPG marketplace. You can even talk during combat sequences. A unique mystical cyberpunk story line is the highlight of the title

sudden a mysterious man shows up and defeats the creatures. He is surprised to see a normal person like you in a place like this. While he is rather rude, he does explain that this building has been transported into another dimension and as long as the person who did this is not defeated, you two can't get out. He tells you to follow him, and though he says he is not going to guarantee your safety, he dispatches the demons of a Japanese Mafiosa on the roof and wins your freedom.

The unusual story line and plentiful FMV cut scenes aside, the actual game is a normal first-person dungeon crawl along the

into personality-dependent categories—for example, angels belong to the "polite/arrogant" type, pixies belong to the "young girls" type, etc. You have to talk differently with each kind

The entities that join you possess an attribute called "loyalty" that ranges from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest. Since creatures with low loyalty will try to disobey your commands and do nothing during a round, you'd better raise this attribute as soon as possible (there are several ways of doing it.) As a puny human, you cannot play the game without having very powerful entities in your party. Moreover, the most powerful

▲▲ Dungeon exploration in Revelations is done in a traditional first-person style, reminiscent of such classics as Wizardry and Dungeon Master

you can hope for, and since PC RPG fans have always been complaining about console RPGs being primitive no-brainers, they definitely should try sinking their teeth into Devil Summoner—the dental work afterward will leave them with memories for years to come. IG

Adidas Power Soccer sports an impressive intro and larger-than-life characters whose polygon counts shift depending on the distance they are from the camera

Adidas Power
Soccer

Psygnosis' first 32-Bit sports title has all the makings of a winner

Smooth scaling and four separate view-points contribute to the high level of quality in Power Soccer's graphics. The realtime 3-D environment utilizes special motion-capture technology to provide highly realistic animation at 30 FPS.

ringing a soccer title to America when gamers here are lukewarm on the sport is never an easy task, but numerous game developers have tried, and some of them have been relatively successful—particularly EA Sports with their FIFA Soccer series. It's clear by the current flood of soccer games that the industry isn't concerned so much about the sport's popularity as it is about having something notewor-thy in either the gameplay or graphics categories.

Upon booting up Adidas Power Soccer (APS), you'll have the chance to see one of the finest uses of motion-capture technology to date in an extremely impressive cinematic introduction. This sequence was developed using the industry's growing standard for 3-D graphics, Microsoft's SoftImage, and the overall impres-sion you'll come away with is one of complete disbelief Seeing play-ers running, tackling and diving in such realistic ways nearly man-dates a visual double take just to be sure that you're not watching actual television. It's that good.

While harping over non-interac-tive introductions can waste a lot of space, the shocking fact is that the same motion-capture tech-niques used in that intro are also used in the course of gameplay, albeit on a somewhat lower quali-ty level. Animated by Actisystem, the motion capture is without a doubt the finest in the soccer genre to date and can even be considered in the upper echelons of the entire sporting category. Even with the amount of motion and polygon detail on screen at a given time, gameplay remains silky smooth (roughly 30 FPS) thanks to the power of the graphical engine. The players are displayed through

At the bottom of the screen there is a small rotating sub-map that details the whereabouts of each player on the field.

a "dynamic envelope" system; the more distant a character gets from the camera, the fewer polygons will be needed to create their bodies. At any polygon level, the animation is still based upon the same motion-captured skeleton.

Many 32-Bit sports titles offer a wide range of viewpoints, but in APS, the number of camera angles is only four. While the number is small, the viewpoints are quite playable and do a great job of showing off the stellar graphics.

Graphical detail and the overall presentational package can only take a game so far, and in APS's case, luckily, the gameplay does indeed stack up and won't disap-point hard-core soccer fans or newbies who just want to have fun. Four modes of gameplay are offered: Friendly Match, Season, Tournament and Arcade. AI in gen-eral is quite impressive, bringing you an aggressive and strategic computer opponent. Each player has a number of characteristics which determine his performance including physical (height, weight, speed, etc.), technical (strength, precision, tackle level, dribble level) and mental (discipline, will power, aggressiveness). Each of these parameters will forecast just how well each player performs.

One key area where APS excels is in the sheer quantity of possible moves, including the powerful
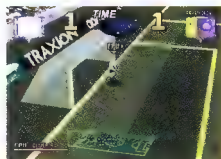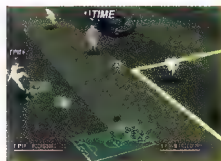
"Predator Kick." This kick, activat-ed through a controller press (and not an easy one to pull off), is the most powerful move in the game and will often send the opposing goalie to the ground when direct contact is made. (The main benefit Adidas sees from the game is the advertising and publicity for their new soccer shoe, which not coinci-dentally, is called the "Predator.")

The usual array of sound effects do a good job of not only provid-ing a stadium ambiance, but nice player effects as well. Much like FIFA Soccer '96, an enthusiastic announcer does the play-by-play, though you're provided with much more colorful commentary and phrases that aren't looped every few seconds While the entire musi-cal bundle isn't anything award winning, it does its job in a quality way without going overboard.

Psygnosis has its sights set on making a name for itself in the next-generation sports category.

Psygnosis has its sights set on making a name for itself in the next-generation sports category, and Adidas Power Soccer looks like it will be the perfect way for them to dip their toe into the crowded world of soccer games. From the looks of APS today, the game will be yet another feather in the cap that rests upon the head of this ever-growing software giant. **IG**

▶ NBA Action '96 includes actual team names as well as player names and numbers on each well-replicated pro jersey.

NBA Action '96

Sega prepares to slam dunk Saturn owners with their latest sports title

▲ Full-motion video sequences are nice, but the style has been used many times before, and the quality of the video doesn't quite match that of Sony's NBA Shoot Out.
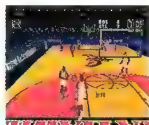
▲ NBA team and player licenses are included in NBA Action '96, allowing for realistic season simulations and current statistics

For the last several years, the battle for 16-Bit sports gaming was fought primarily between the sports divisions of Electronic Arts and Sega of America. As 32-Bit sports titles have stolen the spotlight from their less-advanced predecessors, Sony has emerged to lead the pack with several sports games that rival the best that EA and Sega have yet to offer.

Free of the competitive time constraints placed upon Sony and EA, Sega has been developing their own NBA Action '96 title with the polygonal characters that gave Sony's NBA Shoot Out a slight edge and the standard fully 3-D non-reflective court that will likely appear in the majority of 32-Bit basketball titles

A variety of options and quality audio effects may well be Sega's positive distinguishing factors. You can build your own playoff schedule from the Western or Eastern Conferences, play 28-, 56- or 82-game seasons, view statistics in 25 categories for each of the 12 players on each roster, and view organized league leader stats across multiple categories. Detailed Option screens allow you to adjust such factors as the number of fouls allowed, the aggressiveness of the referees, the rules that will be enforced and the means by which substitutions are made. Marv Albert provides a tremendous amount of crystal-clear running commentary for the game, and the squeaks of shoes and screams of crowd noise are ever-present during the in-game action. A feature to turn music on or off appears in

▲ Rotating camera views are the norm these days and NBA Action is no exception Scaling and zooming abound, but the graphical quality of the court and the shoddy texture-mapping don't stand up to the quality of competing titles, such as Sony's Shoot Out or EA's Live '96.
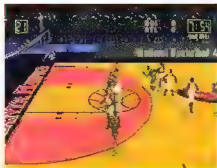
the options, but there were no in-game tracks in the 75 percent version we received.

The court graphics are reasonable at the moment, but not spectacular. Less blocky textures, smoother polygon edges, more dynamic camera motions and cleaner video sequences fall short of Sony's Shoot Out at the moment, but NBA Action holds its own: You can select from overhead, baseline, three-fourth and sideline cameras, rotating any camera to

choose which team will drive toward the top or left side of the court. At the moment, NBA Action's player fluidity is a notch below Shoot Out but reasonable overall—there's nothing mind-blowing about dunk replays or the on-screen motion, but overall it does look real.stic.

Features that really stand out in NBA Action are the easy-to-learn control—partially a result of the simple Saturn controller pad layout—and the ESPN/latter-day NBA art design and television-style layout of on-screen windows and other graphic elements. Whereas

the European-developed Shoot Out has a feeling of superior technical attention to the various game components that comprise basketball—you can attempt shots and dunks with two different buttons—NBA Action makes the gameplay simple from the get-go and translates the various elements of U.S. television-style basketball into TV-style displays, for better or worse.

Of course, Sega has secured both team and player licenses to add to the realism, and a simple

A variety of options and quality audio effects may well be Sega's positive distinguishing factors.

new Role-playing Mode allows you to play entire games and seasons as one real basketball player. If only you could play through the real lives of Philadelphia's Vernon Maxwell or Chicago's Dennis Rodman (who has black hair in this revision of the game), Sega would have an incredibly innovative title on their hands. As it stands, what's here is definitely good but needs significant polish if it's to become great. IG

http://www.segaoa.com/ sports/index.hcm

VR Baseball '96

VR Sports goes up to bat with their second polygonal sports title

Camera angles will put you as close to the characters as you want—often times closer than you'll need or find effective, but at least you have a choice.

One of the latest trends sweeping large game companies is the creation of new product labels to market lines of sports games—EA Sports, Konami's XXL Sports Series and Interplay's VR Sports are among these would-be sports franchises. As the second offering from VR Sports, VR Baseball is a crucial one: This new baseball title must be compelling enough to heal the wounds opened by their mediocre first release, VR Soccer, in order to keep Interplay's new sports label from souring.

Realism is one of the top priorities that the VR Sports team had in mind when laying the foundation for VR Baseball, and their commitment to accuracy is very evident by the amount of money that was spent acquiring the numerous licenses essential to make their product a fully authentic one. VR Baseball is one of the few baseball games on the market to have every Major League Baseball park licensed, in addition to all of the MLB teams and MLBPA players. Gameplay can take place in any real MLB stadium, ranging from the scenic 3-D replica of Coors Field to the drab indoor confines of the Astrodome.

Three-dimensional polygon graphics are steadily becoming the most popular tool for creating in-game realism, and as its name implies, VR Baseball is almost completely comprised of polygonal artwork. Interplay's VR engine utilizes Gouraud-shaded and texture-mapped polygons to create players, objects and arenas, and like many other recent sports games, VR Sports has its own spiffy camera system to take full advantage of the virtual environment. "Virtual FieldVision," as it has been nick-named, will enable gamers to view the action from an almost limitless variety of selectable perspectives on the field, and the unique camera system appears to be one of the few that actually deserves the catchy name that it was given. Many of the visual perspectives are eye-pleasing treats to observe, even if they aren't all that practical for gameplay: Roving cameras, free-floating cameras and multiple first-person perspective views are just a small sampling of what is available.

The participants are motion-captured athletes re-created with mostly Gouraud-shaded polygons, though there are some texture maps applied to key parts of the body (such as players' facial profiles, team logos and uniform numbers). Overall, the bodies of the

The level of detail in character motions is incredible thanks to motion-captured movement—tagging a base really looks like a full-body 3-D dive toward the base.

relatively easy to execute but hasn't been tried yet by others: Texture-mapped faces of the actual players are applied to the polygonal heads of their in-game facsimilies. These facial texture-maps may lack in color, but ignoring some of the goofy ones for the moment,

Every Major League Baseball team, player and park will appear in VR Baseball '96, and characters will use facial textures from real players.

athletes look fairly impressive, while their movements were nearly perfect thanks to the motion-capture technology. Some of the players had their rough spots, which Interplay promises to smooth out by the time the game ships

As has been the case in many sports games, the sound and music aren't inspiring in the preview copy we've tested, but are above average. A credible running commentary is provided throughout the game with an announcer whose opening comments periodically include a stern admonishment to the spectators in the stands that they should not walk on the field—only one of the humorously realistic nuances of this title.

The most popular feature of VR Baseball may well be one that's

they do a credible job at accurately representing the profiles of the baseball players that they are designed to emulate. If nothing else, VR Sports will answer the age-old question: What would Cal Ripken, Jr. look like if his face were entirely flat?

VR Baseball certainly has the potential to become the sturdy anchor that a new sports label would relish. With a handful of new, innovative and realistic features that this title brings to the video game version of America's (favorite?) pastime, VR Baseball stands a good chance of becoming one of the premier console baseball franchises. **IG**

http://www.interplay.com

▶ Each character his/her own distinct fighting style, as well as a unique victory pose. In Paul's case, hair style comes into play too...

Tekken 2

Namco goes beyond the competition to deliver a CD full of deep gameplay and gorgeous aesthetics

Publisher: Namco

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Namco

Release: September 1996

When most companies convert arcade games for play at home, they focus on trying to make the home graphics as close to the originals as possible and retaining as many of the sound effects as can be squeezed into limited memory. Given the fact that their current System 11 technology is based on the PlayStation chipset, making home conversions almost as simple as popping the original arcade code onto CD-ROMs, Namco has chosen to take the extra time to improve their System 11 arcade conversions before releasing them into the crowded home marketplace.

True to form, Namco has taken two unusual steps with their home conversion of the already impressive arcade game Tekken 2: They increased the game's playability and added to the story line with heaping spoonfuls of beautifully rendered video. The resulting product is an excessively deep one-on-one fighter that can also claim to be a cinematic masterpiece, deeper in play mechanics and full of more fully developed characters than any home 3-D fighter to date.

Your earliest impressions of Tekken 2 will undoubtedly be

▲ You'd think that developers are running out of ideas when boxing kangaroos and fighting raptors are included, but in actuality, these two characters require much skill.

▲ Tekken 2 brings back the incredible depth of gameplay that made its predecessor such a major player in the fighting genre last year. Impressive visuals and a multitude of moves and combos, coupled with fabulous music make Tekken 2 one of the hottest fighters ever.

shaped by the first thing you see when booting the disc: A brand-new stylish prerendered scene, which briefly introduces most of the game's characters, emphasizing the 10 standard playable fighters

and particularly the story behind the re-emergence of Heihachi Mishima, father of Tekken 1's winner, Kazuya Mishima (see sidebar). Immediately striking is Namco's mastery of the latest generation of

Namco has taken the extra time to improve their System 11 arcade conversions before releasing them.

The Characters

Paul

Jack-2

Yoshimitsu

Nina

Michelle

King

Law
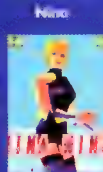
rendering tools and tricks, which makes their second Tekken opening far more spectacular than the first: Incredibly complex objects from motorcycles, to the intricate gears of a robot's arm are as realistic as one could hope for, everybody moves with human fluidity—in some part thanks to improved motion-capture technology—and newer-generation particle generation effects give fog, smoke, explosions and hair unparalleled realism.

That's when you're presented with the first set of options, which allow you to choose from several different modes of play. Arcade Mode duplicates the arcade game's settings and screens. Versus Mode is a standard human versus human competition mode. Team Battle Mode lets human opponents each choose a team of eight characters to use against each other, Time Attack Mode sets a human against the computer to beat the game in the shortest length of time, Survival Mode sees how many computer opponents a human player can defeat with one lifebar, and Practice Mode allows human players to learn all of the game's special moves and multihit combination attacks.
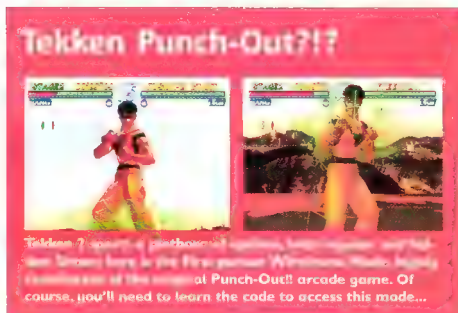
Most of these modes have

appeared in games before, but several aspects of Tekken 2's game design make each mode special. First, you have an obscene number of characters to choose from While there is a set of standard characters you can choose from (see sidebar), there is also an even larger collection of special Bosses and sub-Bosses which become selectable player characters as you defeat them—25 characters are playable in total, eclipsed only by the 26-character two-dimensional fighter King of Fighters '95. While the sub-Boss characters were patterned off of the eight standard player characters in Tekken, they've been further differentiated and given new moves in Tekken 2. Five of the Bosses (Bruce, Roger, Alex, Baek and Angel) are entirely new to the series and have some distinctive moves and attacks Roger is a surprisingly competent boxing kangaroo, Alex is a fighting raptor, Bruce is a powerful boxer, Baek is a kickboxer and Angel is the Devil's powerful opponent.

If the large number of characters wasn't enough to make Tekken 2 worth your time, the game's second special feature certainly is: A huge variety of special moves.

Tekken Punch-Out?!?

Tekken 2 ... at Punch-Out!! arcade game. Of course, you'll need to learn the code to access this mode...

counter-attacks and ground attack styles give the game unparalleled depth for a 3-D fighter, and using both the game's Practice Mode and

buttons spastically, and even better when you know what you're doing. Auto-guard blocking (meaning that you block without holding back-

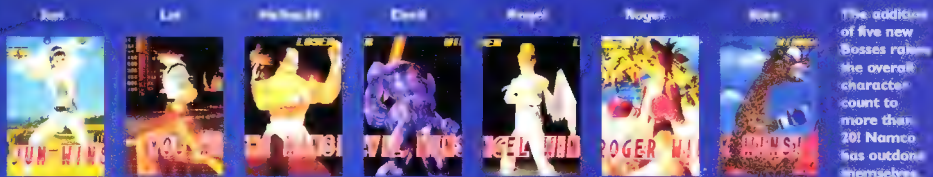## Five of the bosses are entirely new to the series and have some distinct moves and attacks.

built-in on-screen move lists, you can train yourself to learn the deep, fun and unique fighting styles of each character Some characters excel at grappling attacks—notably, grabs in Tekken 2 can be combined five layers deep if you can execute the correct button presses, while others have several different types of kick combinations which can be initiated from laying down on the ground. Nina, for example, has more than 70 different special moves and unique combinations in total, and as you might imagine, controller mastery and a solid memory are musts if you're going to play the game against its most advanced masters.

By the same token, however, Tekken 2 is a lot of fun even for people who stink at fighting games. As Sega accomplished with Virtua Fighter and its sequel, Namco's fluid character animation has made it possible for characters to look really good even when you're just pressing the joystick and

ward or hitting a button) means that you're always deflecting chest blows unless you're doing a move, lying on the ground or flying through the air, and separate left and right arm and leg buttons leave the player a lot of independent limbs to mess around with. Combine all of this with the game's cast of weird but vicious characters—street punks, martial artists, wild animals and supernatural creatures—and you have a lot of personality to mix with the game's substantive content. Difficulty
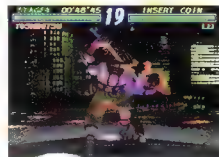
▲ Backgrounds may lack parallax, but overall graphical quality and presentation is top notch. The city scene shown here is one of the best backgrounds in the game.

▲ Each character has numerous attacks and combination maneuvers, and the ever-popular juggling and ground attacks are as alive as ever. As you can tell by this photo, background graphics look stunningly realistic, and, as you'll need to see at home, animation is very fluid.

The addition of five new Bosses raises the overall character count to more than 20! Namco has outdone themselves

settings furthermore allow players ranging from young children to teenagers to older gamers to compete against computerized opponents of their expertise, and even poor players can win and watch the rendered cinematic endings—one ending for every one of the game's characters

Indeed, Tekken 2 has a large number of assets, but there are a few little flaws here and there which merit examination. In the past, *IG* has had small reservations about 3-D fighting games for three reasons: Their 3-D camera movement tends to preclude effective air combat, their attack styles are generally shallow and simplistic and their enemy artificial intelligence (AI) is low. As mentioned before, Tekken 2 deals with the latter two issues wonderfully, but it does not make real strides toward including a real system of air attacks and counterattacks, a legitimate weakness in 3-D fighters from Virtua Fighter to Zero Divide to the last Tekken game.

Instead, Namco has chosen to

way to use the knowledge acquired to date to make 3-D air combat a reality as well.

In addition, while Tekken 2's audio is more than a step up from

▲ Another one of the hidden codes gives players a super-deformed "big head" look, a strangely common feature found in many recent Japanese-born fighting games

Tekken—the game includes all of Tekken's music (original and remixed) and a huge variety of brand-new songs which range from funky urban swank to unique techno chant tracks and many things in between—the graphics are not universally better. While the body poses and character animation are nearly flawless and seamless from

parallax scrolling with two fluid, smoothly shaded and textured characters on the screen—they decided to simplify some of the more difficult programming routines found in Tekken 1 when designing Tekken 2. Backgrounds were flattened—there are no layers of parallax scrolling to be found any more—and the best effects you'll see from stage to stage are two large floor spotlights which follow the characters and a huge Toshinden/Destruction Derby style arena monitor which appears in the game's final arena. The flat background pictures look good, but don't leap out at you or stay in your memory.

Since players always want to see something "new" and "better" than before, Namco added light-source shading to the characters, an effect which is supposed to make the player see the shadows, dark spots and highlights created by sun- or lamp-lights; moreover, when you connect with an especially powerful attack, punch or kick is supposed to give off a brief flash of energy which illuminates the absorbing area of your opponent's body. In brief, the light-source shading effects are unfortunately barely noticeable, and because the programmers chose to

use flat light-source shading instead of Gouraud smooth shading, the edges of polygons are quite pronounced and some of the characters look even less realistic

Tekken 2 has a large number of assets, but there are a few little flaws here and there that merit examination.

than their Tekken counterparts. When you use his white outfit, Kuma the bear looks like a huge walking icicle, and the flabby body of Ganryu the sumo wrestler is notably angular rather than smooth.

Last on the list of changes from Tekken 1 to Tekken 2 is the removal of the user-configurable camera option—in Tekken, you could press the Start button to change the camera's position slightly through a total of four overhead or alternative side angles, and in Tekken 2 the camera has been fixed in a standard side-scrolling position which changes

Fighters in Tekken 2 can be knocked on their backs only to spring up in their choice of counter attacks.

entirely maximize the ground-based 3-D combat pioneered by Virtua Fighter, allowing attacks from all sorts of positions on or near the floors of the stages. Fighters in Tekken 2 can be knocked on their backs only to spring up in their choice of counter attacks, can break and reverse grabs, can spin opponents around and attack them from behind and—in the game's most controversial and Killer Instinct-style concept—can chain together special devastating 10-hit combination strings. (Note that there are still no Virtua Fighter or Zero Divide-style Ring Outs or near-Ring Outs.) While we applaud Namco for taking 3-D ground fighting a step beyond Virtua Fighter 2, we're hoping that someone can find a

move to move, (a decided step above Tekken's) the characters themselves use a different shading technique which decreases their on-screen smoothness, the backgrounds are simpler than those in Tekken and even the good-looking Character Select Screen was simplified from Tekken 1 to Tekken 2—all of which make the translation work from arcade to home easier on the programmers.

Unlike the Virtua Fighter series, where Sega leapfrogs itself technologically with a new piece of arcade hardware for each version of the game, Namco's designers created both Tekken and Tekken 2 using only PlayStation hardware at the core. Though they got pretty good performance out of the original Tekken configuration—slight

▲ The camera switches views during special moves and pans around to show the best available angle of an attack. Pictures really don't do it justice, however, as the smooth camera movement needs to be seen to truly be appreciated

Keeping it in the Family

As has been the case with many fighting game sequels, Tekken 2 proceeds on the premise that a single character won the last game's tournament—in this case, the winner was Kazuya, son of Tekken final Boss Heihachi Mishima. Under special circumstances, the player could fight and use an evil secondary version of Kazuya (Devil Kazuya), who was essentially just the old character with a slightly different costume.

For Tekken 2, the father's and son's roles have changed: Humbled and humiliated by his son's victory, Heihachi enters into the second Iron Fist tournament as one of the 10 standard playable contestants, and a more pompous Kazuya sits atop the tourney's throne. Housing two spirits within himself, Kazuya embodies both an angel—the destroyer of evil—and the devil, a power hungry villain.

The full stories of these characters are far more interesting: If you used Kazuya to reach the end of Tekken, you were treated to a

rendered cinema in which the prime protagonist scooped up his defeated father, threw him off of a cliff, turned to the camera and smiled before the screen faded to black—presumably the end of Heihachi. The Tekken 2 arcade game simply opened with a screaming Heihachi mysteriously alive again; the home version explains his story and takes it further.

As rain falls from the heavens upon the cliff where Kazuya gained his throne, the camera descends the rocky precipice and stops just in time to find a bandaged hand clutching its way upward. Moving outward, the camera catches the angered face of a rain-soaked Heihachi, who somehow managed to thwart death on his way to the abyss.

▲ An angered Heihachi returns to avenge his near death at the hands of his son after the first tournament. The cinematic endings associated with each character really add to the overall enjoyment and satisfaction of Tekken 2.

Kazuya defeated his father, threw him off of a cliff, turned to the camera and smiled...

If you're good enough to beat the game with Heihachi, you'll bear witness as he gains what might be deemed adequate revenge on his wayward son: Picking up the defeated Kazuya, Heihachi walks over to an active volcano and pitches the lad into the lava. Escaping by helicopter, Heihachi smiles at the camera as the volcano erupts, quite possibly engulfing Kazuya in flames. Is Kazuya's devil

lucky enough to save his life for Tekken 3?

On the other hand, if you gain access to Kazuya as a playable character, you'll see a far different turn of events: Defeating his devil, Kazuya turns to walk away from the battle, held just as the demon is gaining a second wind. As the devil stands up and fires a blast of energy at the unsuspecting Kazuya, a curiously charitable Heihachi flings him out in front of the blast, saving Kazuya's life. Smiling, perhaps at his luck, or perhaps at his father's death, Kazuya grabs Heihachi's body and uses it as a human shield against the devil's energy attacks, flinging the corpse at the devil as a last-minute diversion. Distracted, the devil turns to deflect the flying Heihachi, and Kazuya unloads with a finishing uppercut. Finally victorious over both of his demons, Kazuya smiles one last time before the picture disappears.

▲ Defeating the game as Kazuya results in the final putting an end to his feud with both his father and the devil. But is it really the end? Doubt it.

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only to show throwing moves and victory poses. As was the case with both of the other graphical changes, this is a minor technical issue which doesn't detract from the game's overall quality, especially given the inclusion of a secret Punch-Out!! code which emulates Nintendo's classic arcade boxing game—enter the code and you'll play Tekken 2 from a Behind-your-

character View complete with the green wireframe that was only present in Punch-Out!!'s arcade version. Two levels of character deformation are also possible via a code, making your character huge and babylike.

As an arcade game, Tekken 2 was deeper than its predecessor and had a small share of neat new graphic effects. With the addition
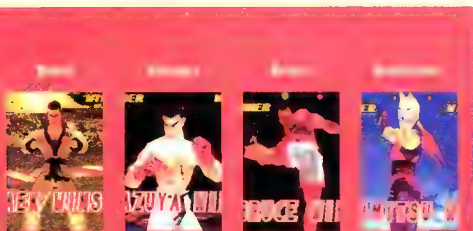
of much-improved remixed music, rendered opening and ending scenes, new codes, new modes of play and the ability to practice moves and learn combos from an in-game tutorial, Tekken 2 is a perfect arcade translation with 25 percent more content than even the arcade game could offer. If you're a fan of the arcade games or fighting games in general, you must give Tekken 2 a try, and it's one of the rare games we'd recommend as worthy of a purchase. Having said that, however, it's not the most impressive fighter ever in terms of 3-D background artwork or air combat—both areas where it falls short—but it's a definite benchmark for other companies to follow when translating arcade games in the future.

IG

http://www.namco.com

The Art of Fighting background shown here begins with a short trip up a wooden elevator shaft, ending when the elevator's floor panel merges with a larger play area.

The King of
Fighters
'95

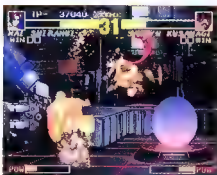SNK's first 32-Bit translation from the Neo•Geo hits the Saturn hard

SNK's attention to background details will impress even the most jaded viewer—often a couple screens high, scenes are packed with parallax and full of great special effects. Translucent waterfalls (left) have realistic fluidity; a crashed Ikari helicopter brings nostalgia.

Kof '95's Bosses are the fiery Shishu Kusanagi and Krauser-esque Omega Rugal

The King of Fighters '95 is a game of many firsts—it's the first cartridge and CD combination game for the Sega Saturn, the first port in a long time SNK has published itself, and the first SNK game to be released for any game system other than the Neo•Geo since SNK announced over a year ago that they would no longer license out any titles. As the best translation of one of the finest games SNK has made, The King of Fighters '95 will make Saturn owners glad SNK changed their minds.

In the last few years, SNK has made its name practically synonymous with 2-D fighting games. Attempting to cash in on the craze started by Street Fighter II, SNK began developing one-on-one fighting games at an alarming rate—Fatal Fury, Art of Fighting, Samurai Shodown...the list goes on and on. Although all of these attempts have resulted in a veritable sea of mediocre fighters, through trial and error they also have given birth to a select few fighters of excellent quality. The King of Fighters '95 is just such a game, taking many of the play elements and even some of the characters that have worked in previous SNK games, and combined them into one product with detailed graphics and tight control.

KoF '95 shows its breadth from the moment you hit the Character Selection Screen: There are 24 main characters to choose from, roughly twice as many as most current fighters, and two additional Bosses accessible via a code. Many characters appear from previous SNK games—regulars such as the Sakazakis and Garcia from Art of Fighting and the Bogards and Higashi from Fatal Fury, as well as some from classic SNK games, including Ikari Warriors and Psycho Soldier. Other characters are related in various ways to the SNK universe, and there are even a few cameos in the backgrounds for keen-eyed trivia buffs.

In addition to the incredible number of playable characters, there are no less than five different battle modes to choose from. As in the original King of Fighters '94, Team Competition Mode—the primary mode of play—sets the player against the computer in a three-on-three battle. The player can choose from any of eight preset teams or create their own, also choosing the order in which the trio will fight. Each character fights until they lose a round, at which point the next character will jump in until all three combatants on either side have been defeated. This new method of competition works well in KoF '95: Being good with just one character

isn't enough, and it helps the player learn the huge array of characters faster than the standard one-on-one system would. Also, a hint of strategy is introduced as players decide what order would be most advantageous to play their fighters—a more important decision than you might think.

As one might imagine, loading the character data for six charac-

KoF'95 shows its breadth from the moment you hit the Character Screen; there are 24+ unique choices.

ters total would seem like a lot to ask of the Saturn—after all, Mortal Kombat II couldn't even keep two characters' animations all in memory at once. That's where the cartridge comes into play, containing the characters' movement algorithms and thus minimizing the loading time, which clocks in at an impressive one- or two-second delay between character swaps.

For people uncomfortable with three-on-three fighting, standard one-on-one, best two out of three rounds fighting is also a part of KoF '95. You can choose Single Vs. Mode for two-player one-on-one fighting, Single Competition Mode for one opponent (chosen at random) from each of the eight teams plus the two Bosses, or Single

Battle Royale Mode, in which you fight all 23 other characters before facing the Bosses.

In keeping with the wide scope of character selection, gameplay is likewise diverse and complex—a combination of many elements SNK pioneered in the genre along with a few borrowed from other successful titles. Four buttons are reserved for the basic attacks—weak punch, weak kick, strong punch and strong kick. Special moves use the conventional Street Fighter II motions (fireball, dragon punch, etc.) and variations, so even beginners should have no trouble pulling them off. You can also make a quick dash by tapping the joystick forward or back twice.

the Saturn version, giving the player access to all the various moves with speed and ease

Another aspect that keeps KoF '95 enjoyable is the sheer number and variety of attacks and special moves. Besides all the standard punches and kicks, each character has anywhere from five to seven unique special moves. Add to this guard reversals, a couple of throws and a super special move (available when your POWer meter is full or your health meter is almost empty) and you have a whole lot of moves for each character. All of these moves allow for combos and even some air-juggling for the more experienced players, but the game

Saturn vs. Neo•Geo: Which is Better?

Shown on the left is the Saturn version of King of Fighters '95 —on the right is the Neo•Geo CD version. Notice how the two screens are virtually identical; purists may want to note however, that the left and right sides of the Saturn screen are slightly cropped.

SNK seemed so devoted to having a large number of characters that they didn't fully develop a few.

Sounds simple? You also have a whole slew of other moves through combinations of those buttons: A and B will have your player temporarily duck into the background and dodge any attack; by holding A, B and C you can fill your own POWer gauge to make pressing attacks, and tapping B and C will perform a taunt (aptly named the "dis" move) which takes away POWer from your opponent. Finally, C and D together produce a "knock-down attack," a powerful blow that will knock your opponent right off their feet. All these button combinations were originally inserted out of necessity since the Neo•Geo (which the game was

never becomes a KI-style combination fest—combos are rarely more than three or four hits, and require skill and timing to pull off. Unlike other games where smashing random buttons might get you a long chain combo the first time you play, combos in KoF '95 are more a reward for passing through the learning curve—a sign that you are an experienced player.

Graphically, KoF '95 is top-notch. Each of the different backgrounds (nine in total) has been created with an emphasis on detail, giving each stage a personality of its own. Each of the backgrounds is so extensive that just pausing the game and looking at the artwork

greatest flaw seems to be closely related to one of its greatest assets: The sheer number of playable characters. It seems that SNK was so devoted to having a large number of characters that some received a lot less attention than others. For example—the Ikari Warriors team, where all three men are generic-looking and boring, with hardly any transitory animations—especially when compared to the majority of the fighters who animate beautifully. Furthermore, a few of the characters are horribly unbalanced in the power department compared with others, mostly the same poor losers that were slighted in the animation and style departments. Still, if you accept that most fighting games have one or two guys not up to snuff, and realize that even without these players, KoF '95 still has more quality playable characters than most, it's much easier to overlook these faults.

In the audio department, KoF '95 has average music which could have easily done much better. For some reason, the Saturn got the original cartridge version of the soundtrack instead of the superior orchestrated music SNK produced for the Neo-CD translation, so the music is rather plain, and doesn't add much to the game, although it's not bad enough to detract much. Sound effects, on the other hand, are very well done. Lots of clear voice samples and a wide variety of other realistic noises add to the intensity of matches.

So now for the question present and would-be Neo-CD owners must be asking themselves: "how does the Saturn version compare to the Neo?" Both games share all the same moves and are equally animated—everything visual has been brought over faithfully from the Neo•Geo, except the screen on the

Saturn version's aspect ratio is squished slightly on the left and right sides of the screen on an average TV. As a result, everything appears thinner on the Saturn, though remaining the same height (see comparison pics).

All in all, KoF '95 is a terrific port, demonstrating that even the most memory-intensive Neo•Geo arcade games can appear on CD game consoles with a little ingenuity on the part of the programmers. There's more breadth to be found here than in any other home fighting game, and a very reasonable amount of depth as well. **IG**

Terry winds up for an aerial special move, splashing animated water upward as his teammates cheer on. The water flows in 3-D as you wade in to trade blows.

originally designed for) only has four buttons, but as pressing two or more buttons at the same time on demand can be difficult and extremely frustrating, you can thankfully take advantage of the Saturn pad by giving these moves their own buttons in the Configuration Menu. This is a big boon for

can be a treat. Matching the graphic quality of the backgrounds are the characters themselves; they are good sized but not huge, and all are drawn nicely, with good use of color and shading.

The character animation, however, is not so uniformly wonderful as the graphics. Ironically, KoF '95's

▶ Sadly, the digitized and retouched art-work—notably the facial portraits here—are low-color and occasionally goofy, though the general perspective isn't bad

HardBall 5

Accolade delivers a bland and virtually 2-D baseball title for the PlayStation

Publisher: Accolade

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Accolade

Release: Now

▲ Fielding might look reasonable in still screenshots, but control problems plague the action.

▶ The difference between the rendered sequences and the in-game artwork is more striking in HardBall 5 than it is in other PS baseball games, notably Konami's Bottom of the Ninth

t seems like decades ago that HardBall was one of the most innovative and visually impressive sports games on the market, and unfortunately, the newest release in the popular series of baseball titles, HardBall 5, pales in comparison.

From version to version, the quality of HardBall games over the years has been in a state of consistent flux. This season is an off-year for the series, because not only is HardBall 5 for the PlayStation one of the most disappointing versions of the game, it is also one of the least impressive and ambitious baseball games to hit any 32-Bit platform.

Shunning the current trend of sports titles using 3-D polygonal

▲ In these shots, taken from the closest Behind-the-batter View, you see your batter aiming his batting crosshair within a specified targeting space ...and missing. Animation on this 32-Bit title fails to outdo Sega and Blue Sky Software's World Series Baseball for the Genesis.

visuals, HardBall 5 is essentially a vanilla two-dimensional baseball game. As a result, there are real limits on the gameplay perspectives—only two classic Batter's Views and a Pitcher's View. Most ordinary are the non-scrolling static field views. Smaller windows

with defensive field alignments. All of these are chosen by quick presses of a controller These choices are followed up by a selection of pitches and batting styles. Some pitchers may be able to choose between a fastball, sinker and screwball, while another may have
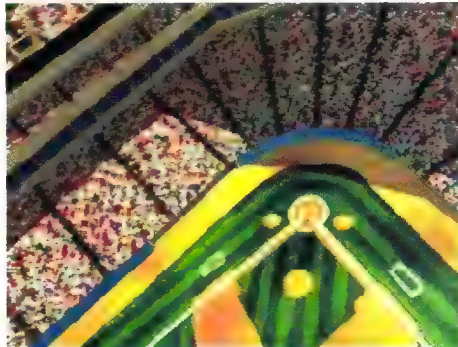
Sluggish controls and an outdated 2-D interface have you making mistakes rather than having fun.

the ability to throw a wicked curve or off-speed pitch. Batters are allowed to bunt or to bat with either contact or power in mind. Once the ball is sent into play, the screen quickly changes to the area of the field relative to the action, allowing you or the computer to field the ball as required.

Unfortunately, this largely unimpressive interface has a collection of nagging problems. The gameplay is sluggish in nearly every aspect, and the player control on the field isn't as precise and tight as it needs to be

The combination of these control problems often causes you to over-run a fly ball while trying to

The Bottom Line

Tradition is valued in U.S. baseball—the act of doing something over and over again. Unfortunately, tradition doesn't quite work in HardBall 5's favor, as old-fashioned interfaces and graphics are beginning to make this cornerstone of baseball video games a stale shadow of its former glory.

are also present on the screen which show the positions of base runners as needed

Essential gameplay strategies are chosen before the action starts—managerial decisions include base running maneuvers such as "Hit-and-Run" plays and steals, while pitchers can tinker

cover the ground needed to catch it, which ultimately leads to numerous and unwarranted fielding errors. The player may eventually adapt to the game control, but it still retains an awkward feel.

Even more disappointing than the aging game engine are the low-color graphics and animation that adorn it. For example, the aesthetics of the batting sequence are among the worst offenders: Before the batter receives the first pitch, a picture of the player's face is dis-
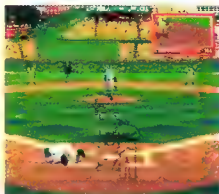
▲ Just imagine what sort of insightful comments Cincinnati's Marge Schott could whip up for this scene

HardBall 5's wealth of additional events and options would have been welcome in a better environment.

▲ Commonplace statistics cannot compare to the tracking powers of Stormfront's Tony La Russa 3 (see preview this issue).

played, along with his statistics and other relevant information. Instead of the pictures consisting of digitized or well-drawn art, they are for the most part, a collection of low-color, poorly touched-up pictures of each MLBPA player

Some of the players would be

Unfortunately, they neglected to gain an MLB team license. The result: All of your favorite teams are now represented by ugly, odd logos and insignias best illustrated by Atlanta's logo resembling a dinosaur, and Houston sporting a strange logo that looks like some sort of crazed El—it just doesn't feel the same when you're up to bat with Sammie Sosa of the Chicago '96 Mad Red Balls. It must be noticed, however, that Accolade must have recognized this problem, as they have actually included a primitive Icon Editor with the game. Although this feature is rather unique, we can't imagine that many people will sit down to draw their favorite team's logo pixel by pixel. At best, it's a built-in

contain an unforgivably low number of colors, resulting in a cheesy feel to the sequence This problem is remedied somewhat if the action is viewed from a more distant vantage point, thus smoothing out the blocky player graphics to a degree. Even the cartoony fonts and statistical displays are somewhat of an eyesore.

Quite frankly, the audio in HardBall 5 is one of the few places in which this game doesn't strike out. Al Michaels is probably more

recognized as the play-by-play announcer of Monday Night Football than he is as a baseball commentator, but this certainly does not detract from a more than credible job at providing commentary for this baseball game. The announcing is remarkably fluid and well-digitized, with nearly every player's name being announced as he comes up to the plate. In-game

action is also narrated with standard quips used while describing the action as it happens on the field. The music, however, draws mixed feelings: The problem with the music in HardBall 5 is that although there is an assortment of old-fashioned stadium tunes, many of them just don't sound authentic enough. The music pieces may be recognizable and played at the right times, but somehow, the instruments used to play the tracks just don't sound right. It should be

◀ From the game's more distant Behind-the-Batter View, the action becomes even closer in appearance to a 16-Bit sports simulation.

noted that the music played during intermissions and on the menu screens is of good quality.

It's too bad that Accolade's delivery of HardBall is so flawed, because there is a wealth of options and additional events available in the game. Extracurricular activities include a Home Run Derby, and pitching and batting practice to sharpen your skills. Extensive League options are available, and there are a dizzying array of team and individual statistics available to satisfy even the most demanding baseball fan. The Season Mode features comprehensive statistical tracking, with the option of saving the compiled stats on a memory card.

HardBall 5 has all of the clinical symptoms of a PC port gone awry. All of the strategic elements that are so beloved by the PC gamer have translated well to the PlayStation, but the high-resolution, high-color graphics have not. Additionally, console owners generally want more of a high-octane game engine that most PC sports games simply do not have. Perhaps for HardBall 6, Accolade will strive to produce a compelling baseball game that retains the general audio and statistical competence of HardBall 5, and re-emphasizes both gameplay and visual issues. 🅸🅶

▲ A less than exciting overview of the stadium's field is pleasantly lush but not very smooth, a product of underutilizing the PlayStation hardware to display low color palette bitmapped graphics rather than smooth shaded polygons

horrified to see some of the "unique" facial changes that came to bear on their photos.

The giggles don't stop there Because Accolade acquired an MLBPA license, most of the pro baseball players are present

glorified Etch-A-Sketch.

In addition to the questionable player and logo art, the player-controlled batter is nothing to marvel at. Although the animation on the players is adequate while they are at bat, the large sprites

GRAPHICS: C
- Three Strikes: Low-resolution, low-color, and poorly animated graphics.
- Unimpressive gameplay perspectives.

SOUNDS: B
+ The commentary by Al Michaels is one of the few successful features of this game.
- Very few in-game sounds

GAMEPLAY: C
+/- A nice assortment of a gameplay and statistical options.
- Player control needs some major refinement.
- Nothing even remotely new is offered in this retread.

LASTING POWER: C-
+ There are a lot of features in the game such as League play that add life to this title.
- Unfortunately, subpar graphics and control don't exactly keep you coming back for more.

OVERALL: C

Intelligent Gamer "AVERAGE"
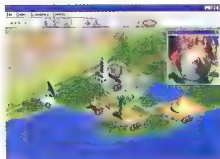
▶ While Deadlock breaks no new ground for a builder-style game, it does have great multiplayer abilities. Modem, Internet and even e-mail turn-based play are possible
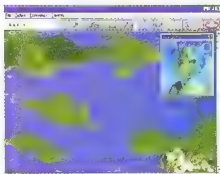
Deadlock

Exploit planets in your spare time!

▲ Each species has advantages and disadvantages. For example, the Ch-ch-t, an insectoid race, breeds rapidly and are adept at theft, yet their military is quite weak.

Deadlock takes one to seven players to the frontiers of space to colonize and develop an alien world, but it hardly goes where no "world building" simulation has gone before. It doesn't introduce anything revolutionary to this game category, but it covers the subject more completely than rival titles.

Gallius IV, an undeveloped Terran world in a disputed quadrant of the galaxy, awaits colonists. Unfortunately, seven races have conflicting claims. The Compact of Gallius IV keeps the seven space fleets idling in orbit, which leaves everything in your hands as Colony leader. Your colony must either build a preset number of cities or drive all other colonies back into space to win Gallius IV.

Each colony begins with a city, 400 colonists, 500 credits, 100 food, 75 wood, 100 energy, 150 iron and a military unit. The colony expands through resource management, economic development and military campaigns.

takes awhile to comprehend all the possibilities and how they interrelate, but a tutorial and on-screen help system ease the colonizer through the learning period.

Control is surprisingly simple and intuitive. For example, a click-and-drag move puts a military unit in a neighboring territory. Double-clicking the unit brings up the

▲ The developers threw in extra little features such as the ability to verbally assault opponents using a dictionary of ready-made insults

unit orders dialogue box. This lists possible battle orders and missions.

Strong visuals enliven Deadlock's diplomatic phase. Colonies send and receive messages on screen, with other

Your colony must either build a preset number of cities or drive all other colonies back into space to win...

The most important of the myriad of pregame options is the choice of species. Each of the seven has unique abilities, though these advantages and weaknesses can be reassigned or allocated differently if the stock characters become boring.

Deadlock offers both turn-based and timed play. Icons control individual functions and, in conjunction with status readouts and graphic displays, gives each colony's commander amazing diversity of action. So much is possible that it

species shown in 3-D rendered graphics. Speech is lip-synched, though some of the voices are corny and generic.

Deadlock is packed with artistic touches like the zoom-in from the planet to the city view. The buildings and terrain are well-depicted, too, though the overall arrangement of the displays is somewhat similar to every world-building game since Populous.

One area in which Deadlock is unsurpassed by any other title in the category is its support for

modem play. You can play a two- or multiplayer game via modem, through a network or over the Internet. There's even an Audiovisual Chat Mode.

Overall Deadlock succeeds by optimizing all the most popular features of world-builder simulations. The result is few surprises, but lots of excellent gaming scope and depth make Deadlock a bright addition to the "empire building" category. Unlike most earlier strategy simulations of this type, Deadlock offers activity in the military, economic and political arenas, rather than focusing on one or even two of the three. While Deadlock is not groundbreaking in audiovisuals, interface or premise, it puts it all together in a way that no previous colonization sim has.

IG

GRAPHICS: B
+ 3-D rendered characters make a strong visual statement.
- The world map and close-ups are too similar to other games.

SOUND: B-
+ Digital, lip-synched speech
- The actors are often too hammy.

GAMEPLAY: A-
+ Choice of realtime or turn-based play

LASTING POWER: A
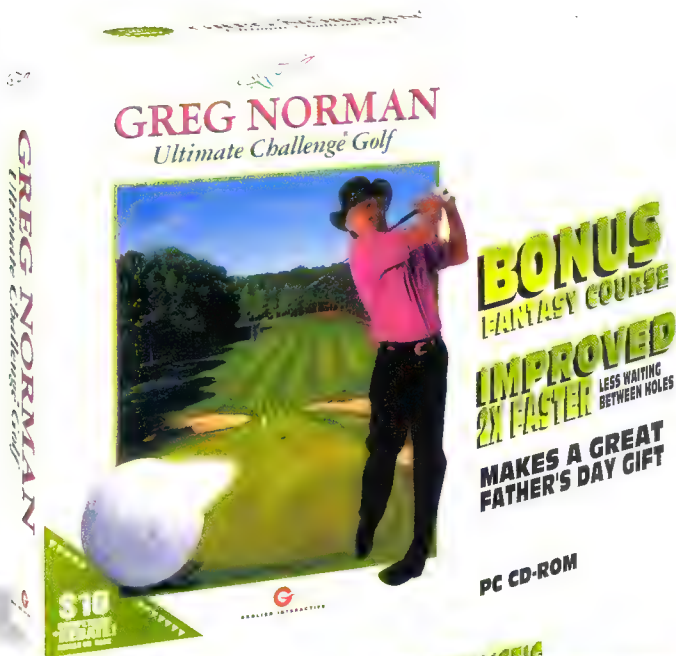+ Multiple species enlarge options.
+ Internet play is a new dimension.

OVERALL:

Intelligent Gamer B+
"RECOMMENDED"

▶ Most striking by comparison to lesser ports such as Tetris X, Bust-A-Move Again's design features both colorful, nicely animated graphics and gameplay which improve upon its predecessor.

Bust-A-Move
Again

Taito improves upon their highly original Neo•Geo action-puzzler and ports it to the PlayStation

Publisher: Acclaim
Platform: PlayStation
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Taito
Release: 2nd Quarter '96

R eleased originally in the arcades, Bust-A-Move (a.k.a. Puzzle Bobble) proved to be one of the most unique games available on Neo•Geo hardware. Bust-A-Move managed to differentiate itself from Tetris by not looking like a direct knockoff. The objective was to launch

▲ The orange ball in your speargun can be attached to two other close orange balls to eliminate them from the screen.

▲ Multiple paths take your character through different scenes and challenges of various sizes

colored balls from the bottom of the screen to the top of the screen at various colored balls that were continually being pushed downward. If the player managed to connect three or more colors, those would disappear and anything attached below them would fall off as well. If the player failed, the balls fall below a certain line and the player is asked to insert another coin.

Sadly, in the last home conversions for the SNES and 3DO, the player's on-screen gun was not able to be aimed to the degree of precision that the arcade game's was, and moreover, the game was less forgiving than the arcade original, which frustrated users.

Bust-A-Move Again in some ways is less of a true sequel than the first home version was. In the home port, you could use fire, lightning and waterfall orbs; this time, only one special sphere is present—a ball that when touched by the ball launched, makes every ball of that color onscreen disappear. Surprise—this one sphere is the best one introduced yet to the series

The gameplay from the original game remains intact, offering the same precise control as the arcade original with a more forgiving and less frustrating movement mechanism than the Super NES version. Detailed still pictures (of beaches, skies, villages and mountains) don't really demand the praise that most 32-Bit 2-D backgrounds do, yet they don't cause distraction either.

Another upgrade in this version is the size of the playfield. While the previous game used only roughly one-third of the screen, BAMA makes use of almost half the screen in Two-player Mode and the full screen in One-player Mode. The characters have also gotten larger and have been given more lively animation.

The inclusion of small animated FMV sequences between stages also seems irrelevant but somehow still adds to the ambiance of the game. Music is a breath of relief: It sounds better than the original

Especially as a PS title, BAMA is a good puzzle game that differs from the rest of the pack.

tracks and there are more songs. Songs change from stage to stage often enough to keep the player from wanting to turn the music volume down, a feature that is, thankfully, provided for later use.

The best option for the best of puzzle games, though, is the ability to play against another person. Like many action puzzle games, BAMA places a player on each side of the screen and adds pieces to the opponent's side as spheres are removed from his or her own.

Taken as a whole, Bust-A-Move Again is moderately improved from its predecessor but benefits noticeably from the changes. It's a good puzzle game with enough difference from the rest of the pack to warrant attention. **IG**

http://www.inter-7.
or.jp/g6/taito/home.html

GRAPHICS: B
+ Great cartoon-like animation.
- Typically boring backgrounds.
- Nothing to show off the graphical power of the PlayStation.

SOUNDS: B+
+ Catchy tunes and more of them than the predecessor.
- It still sounds like video game music and a far cry from the greats.
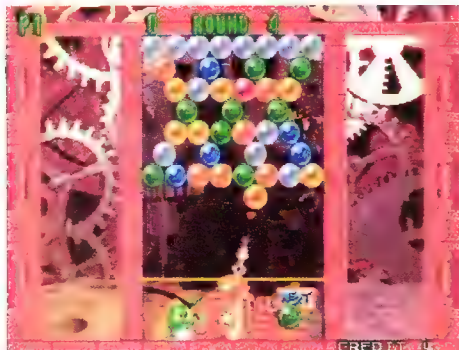
GAMEPLAY: A-
+ Original play mechanics in a under-represented genre.
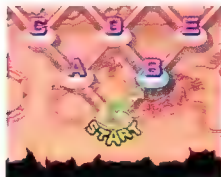- Not all that different from the first game.

LASTING POWER: A
+ Good level of challenge with optional difficulty levels.
+ Two-player Versus Mode in addition to Normal Game Mode.
+ Three Two-player Mode options

OVERALL:
**Intelligent Gamer**
B+
"RECOMMENDED"

...Or come hang with us.

If you're thinking of ending your current situation, come talk to us. We're building a team of talented people who are focused on creating games that people can't get enough of. BOSS Game Studios is the new offspring of an Academy Award winning Hollywood special effects studio. And we need: ARTISTS with at least 2 years experience in 3D modeling and animation, character design, environment design or modeling. PROGRAMMERS with published game titles, C programming and assembly language experience and a college degree or equivalent. DESIGNERS with published game titles and a passion for video games. Fax your resume to 206.556.0547 or e-mail to NOOSE@BOSSGAME.COM. (Recruiters needn't bother.)

BOSS
GAME STUDIOS

Beginning with a distant camera view of the action, Return Fire automatically zooms in to show you intense scenes of graphic combat.
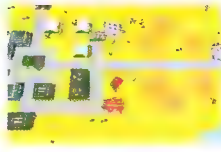
Return Fire

Slightly improving their classic 3DO and Amiga war game, Prolific scores a direct hit

Full-screen and partial-screen modes are easily accessible in the PlayStation version of Return Fire, adding considerably to the visual appeal and seeming limitlessness.

Return Fire for the 3DO used the system's capabilities to put two players in a skewed 3-D world full of rockets, tanks, helicopters, explosions and land mines, all accompanied by perhaps the most fitting compilation soundtrack ever. Today, the PlayStation plays host to Prolific's successful take on Capture the Flag

In Return Fire, two players each operate four different vehicles in an attempt to locate an enemy flag and carry it back to a home base. Battles are played on one of 200 maps of varying complexity. You must destroy the enemy's flag towers (there are several on more advanced levels) until you find the one which contains the flag, then take it back to your base. The catch is: The only vehicle which can take the flag back is the Humvee, which has such poor armor. You must clear a path to the flag with your other vehicles. All the while, your enemy is trying to find your

the flag and "The William Tell Overture" when it is. The helicopter's theme is "The Ride of the Valkyries." (*Apocalypse Now*, anyone?) This music simply adds so much to the mood of the game that it's practically an advertisement for the benefits of CD-based gaming over ROM carts.

There are subtle differences in the PlayStation version over its older 3DO ancestor. The Jeep has been replaced with a Humvee, but this is strictly a slight visual change—handling and performance characteristics are identical. There is also a new Zoom-in Camera Mode which allows you to get a little closer to the action, but usually you want to see as much

the 3DO version is a welcome addition to the PlayStation library, a few changes would have added enough to the game to make it a stand-alone classic. One-player games still do not pit you against a computer opponent—you simply have to avoid predefined defenses. Some objects (i.e., buildings) are only targets—if only they had put power-ups in a few warehouses...

Overall, Return Fire is a tremendously playable game that will remind veteran players of the "good ol' days." There are few better reasons to have a second PlayStation control pad. **IG**

The music is practically an ad for the benefits of CD-based games.

flag and stop you from getting safely back with it. This can get very hectic at times, and a narrow defeat has caused more than a few controllers to be thrown in anger.

Each of the four vehicles has its own distinct purpose, characteristics and control schemes. This is annoying at first, as players have to learn to use four vehicles, but it really adds depth to the game.

Perhaps even better than the simple but effective textured polygon graphics is the classical music score. Each vehicle has its own theme, each in Dolby Surround and masterfully performed: The Humvee has "Flight of the Bumblebee" when it's not carrying

as possible. Passwords allowing you to access more advanced maps are now composed of pictures rather than letters, and you can save them to the PlayStation's memory cartridge. There are, thankfully, around twice as many maps as there were on the 3DO version. Probably the most notable change, however, is the difficulty: Many maps contain more missile towers than before, and you have fewer vehicles (only three of each) with which to win. While the 3DO's frame rate dropped in a heated two-player game, the PlayStation seems to have eliminated this altogether.

While this almost-direct port of

▶ Those who like to take part in the
more strategic forms of baseball (managing,
coaching, chewing tobacco), will be
delighted with LaRussa 3's in-game options
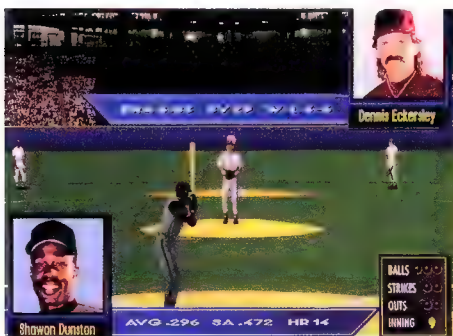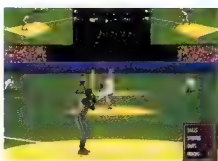
Tony LaRussa
Baseball 3:
1996 Edition

Electronic Arts and Stormfront Studios step up to the plate
once again in the latest addition to the LaRussa series

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Platform: PC

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Stormfront Studios

Release: Now

While Tony LaRussa's St. Louis Cardinals may be enduring growing pains on the real diamond, his new PC game is having much better luck. The 1996 edition of Stormfront Studios' flagship title, Tony LaRussa Baseball 3, reinforces the company's long history of having the premiere PC baseball simulation on the market

LaRussa Baseball is the sort of title that baseball fanatics treasure: A game that

▲ Tony LaRussa Baseball 3: 1996 Edition
(why it's not just called Tony LaRussa 4
truly baffles the mind) is chock-full o' stats,
but will satisfy fans of arcade-style baseball
games as well.

contains a mind-boggling number of statistics with enough strategies and gameplay depth to put all of those numbers to good use. Slugging averages, strikeout averages and putouts are just a small sampling of the categories available, and player attributes receive their own detailed examinations: Each player's ratings are broken down into categories such as contact hitting, power and arm strength, as well as more obscure data such as how a player bats in clutch situations, how he is affected at night games, or even a monthly

breakdown of his performance. If for some odd reason that sort of information fails to satisfy your appetite for knowledge, the 1996 edition of LaRussa also contains a new "head-to-head" feature which provides comprehensive comparisons between individual batters and pitchers.

The beauty of LaRussa 3, however, is that it can still be competently played and enjoyed without the use of the intimidatingly large statistic and rating databases. With a few simple changes at the

Tony LaRussa 3: 1996 Edition is the sort of title that both fans and purists will treasure.

Options Screen, most of the statistics embedded in the complex game engine no longer play an important role in the game, transforming LaRussa into an arcade-style baseball game relying heavily on reflexes instead of brainpower.

This is not to say that the Arcade Mode is innovative or revolutionary—clearly it is not. The pitching and batting interface bear an eerie resemblance to Accolade's HardBall games, allowing the quick selection of a variety of pitches or batting styles before action commences Aesthetically, the SVGA high-resolution, 2-D graphics are effective, producing authentic recreations of popular ballparks in addition to their athletic inhabitants There are some downsides to graphical presentation, however Beyond the uniforms and skin colors, players are merely clones of one another—the mammoth Tony Gwynn is as thin as the speedy

outfielder Brian Hunter.

On the other hand, the digitized audio in LaRussa is outstanding. Gamers can choose from not one, but three different announcers to call the play-by-play—Mel Allen, Hank Greenwalk and Lon Simmons can all be called upon to supply their trademark commentary during gameplay. The announcing is realistic and crisp, referring to each player by name when pitching, batting and fielding

Tony LaRussa Baseball 3 is an excellent baseball simulation which succeeds in satisfying both baseball gamers who enjoy the intricacies of the game and those who just want to have fun. There's no doubt that the 1996 edition of TLR3 is the baseball game to beat in the PC games market. 〔IG〕

http://www.ea.co

GRAPHICS: B
+ The high-resolution, SVGA graphics are pleasing to the eye.
- Some of the player animations are redundant and slightly lacking in frames of animation.

SOUNDS: B+
+ Ambitiously allows the selection of three different high-profile baseball announcers.

GAMEPLAY: A-
+ The best PC baseball simulation out there, with above-average action modes.
+ Loads of gameplay modes and various options.

LASTING POWER: A
+ A sports game like this doesn't get old until the rosters need updating.

OVERALL:

Intelligent Gamer

A+

"HIGHLY RECOMMENDED"

Iron Storm

Working Designs enters the strategy charts...with a bullet

▲ The Map Screen maintains the traditional grid look of the 16-Bit version of Iron Storm (which was originally released for the Mega Drive in Japan). FMV scenes are much more detailed and full of color

Hardcore strategy fans will delight at Working Designs' latest work, Iron Storm, but newcomers to the genre may feel intimidated by the sea of stats and information necessary to succeed.

The game begins with General George Santana's famous quote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," but oddly enough sets itself apart by letting players change the course of history. Set during WWII, Iron Storm gives players the opportunity to take control of the Japanese, Germans or Americans, and take them into battle.

Each of the three nations has its own ups and downs and its own particular type of preferred battle. The U.S., probably the easiest of the three campaigns to complete, maintains air superiority while Japan and Germany hold their own on the water and ground, respectively. Each of the 500 or so units has its own individual ability ratings.

Fortunately, Iron Storm offers a Non-campaign Mode for practice, but does not punish the player for failure. Like many other campaign-based games, Iron Storm has a branching mission structure that allows players to recoup their position later on in the game.

In terms of aesthetics, Iron Storm is inconsistent. Players command their units on drab, hexagon-based maps, while combat scenes feature some of the best pre-SGL 3-D graphics around. The battles are not only graphically pleasing, but also accurately detailed. Each of the 3-D models was painstakingly constructed from actual design specifications for the units. The sound, however, does not have any particularly great moments. Music is played during the map-based unit command, but it is abruptly cut short when battle begins, meaning players are likely to hear the same minute or so of music over and over.

A godsend for strategy buffs, newcomers are bound to find Iron Storm hard to get into due to the swarming, but essential, stats. Definitely worth a look. **IG**

GRAPHICS: ■
+ Excellent pre-SGL 3-D visuals...
- but the map graphics are dull and uninteresting.

SOUNDS: C+
+ Lots of authentic war-time sound effects...
- but not enough to increase the game's listening appeal due to scarce music.

GAMEPLAY: A-
+ One of the best, most detailed games of its type, although a bit daunting for strategy newcomers.

LASTING POWER: A-
+ Three huge campaigns, each with branching mission structures, not to mention multiple endings.

OVERALL:

Intelligent Gamer
"RECOMMENDED" B+

Shining Wisdom

The latest chapter in Sega's 'Shining' saga
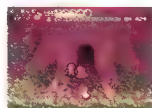
▲ Similar to SNES Zelda, Shining Wisdom prioritizes gameplay over graphics.

▲ Trademark Working Designs humor is littered throughout. Sony execs would be wise to check this one out..

Shining Wisdom is the latest work from Sega of Japan's famed development house, Sonic Team, creators of Sonic the Hedgehog and the entire "Shining" (Darkness/Force/Wisdom) saga.

The easiest way to describe SW is: "SNES Zelda clone." Using certain items and equipment is essential to solving the various puzzles and traps, and there are hidden areas and caves riddled throughout the land. Interaction with townspeople is prominent, but not overdone, and the majority of the game lies in the exploration of the various caves and dungeons. The overall gameplay engine is quite good, with the exception of one miniscule but annoying quirk in that you cannot equip a sword and boots simultaneously, making for lots of flipping back and forth to and from the sub-screen which tends to get overly tedious.

The graphics in Shining Wisdom are for the most part disappointing, but occasionally you'll stumble upon a scene that looks a lot better than the majority of the rest of the game. Some scaling is used here and there, and spell effects look nice, but—and this isn't the first time it's been said about a 32-Bit game—much of this could have been done easily on a Super NES.

The music is a bit more unpredictable than the graphics, as some of the tunes sound really nice, while some sound either totally awkward or just don't fit in to the scenario at hand very well. Sound effects are okay, save the occasional annoying grunt from yourself or your enemies.

It wouldn't be PC to review a WD game and not make mention of the translation, so let it be said: The humor is NOT over-done, and in actuality is balanced quite well. Just be on the lookout for some well-hidden references—they're in there.

Shining Wisdom is in no way a bad game, but rather a slightly "undercooked" action-RPG that will surely hold people over until the boom of new RPGs occurs later this year. **IG**

GRAPHICS: C+
- Decidedly 16-Bit visuals have little to offer...
+/- but then again, Zelda never strived on graphics either.

SOUNDS: B-
+/- Music is slightly above average, but nothing at all worthy of a CD soundtrack.

GAMEPLAY: B+
+ Plenty of different items and techniques to master.
- Not being able to simultaneously equip a sword and boots is a real pain.

LASTING POWER: B
+ Non-linear play and intriguing puzzles will keep players involved for a good while.
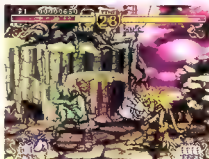
OVERALL:

Intelligent Gamer
"AVERAGE" B-

Golden Axe: The Duel

Sega brings one-on-one fighting to their Golden Axe series

Golden Axe The Duel's graphics attempt to mimic SNK's large anime-styled characters and artwork, but the lack of parallax leaves backgrounds looking flat and uninspired.

Golden Axe: The Duel, which originally appeared on Sega's ST-V arcade hardware, is Sega's entry into the crowded 2-D fighting game genre, which traditionally has been dominated by companies such as Capcom and SNK. Apparently Sega's been taking notes, since GA:TD seems to have been heavily influenced by SNK's Samurai Shodown series.

Sega added a few clever twists to GA:TD, like the magic bar which is reminiscent of the Power Gauge in Samurai Shodown 2. When the gauge is activated, your character can use his or her super move, and in addition, normal attacks can cause more damage. Rather than the gauge increasing when your character takes damage (a la SS2), GA:TD requires you to pick up small potions (left behind after beating the stuffing out of the little dwarves that run
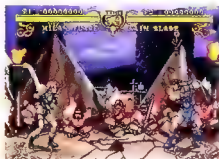
around during the match) to activate your gauge.

Graphically, GA:TD is sharp. The playfield scales smoothly, and the backgrounds are alive with animation (yet curiously devoid of any parallax). Characters are animated smoothly, but the animation is unfortunately not as fluid as a modern Capcom or SNK game.

GA:TD's audio is a mixed bag. Most of the music is pretty good, and the voices are well done, but some tunes just sound downright awful, like Pancho's tune or the mishmash that plays on the High Score Entry Screen. The balance of sound effects and music isn't very good either, with tunes so loud that sounds are nearly inaudible.

When all is said and done, GA:TD is basically a near-carbon copy of Samurai Shodown. The feel is remarkably similar, and in terms

of features, it could almost be called Samurai Shodown 1.5. However, with so many other 2-D fighters on the system, you can easily pass this one up in favor of Night Warriors or King of Fighters '95. IG

GRAPHICS: B+
+/- Nice background scaling... but no parallax.
+/- Characters are animated well...but not as smooth as recent arcade games.

SOUNDS: C+
- Music ranges from decent to completely unbearable.
+ The voices are fairly clean... if you can hear them over the music.

GAMEPLAY: B-
+ Gameplay is decent but uninspired, and control is solid.
- Unfortunately, even with some innovative features, this game breaks little ground.

LASTING POWER: B+
+ It is a two-player fighting game...
- but if you're a fighting game veteran, this one may not hold your interest for long.

OVERALL:
Intelligent Gamer
"AVERAGE" B-

Tokyo Highway Battle

PS racing action takes to the highways

The graphics in Tokyo Highway Battle look a lot like a weak Ridge Racer clone.

The Japanese have always had a knack for taking foreign ideas and changing them around to suit their culture better. As an example, they have created a new variant on the typical road race: Instead of merely trying to get the best time, style plays a major role as well. The style can be called a "drift competition," where the object is to go into a controlled skid on every corner, even if it's not necessary to do so.

THB is developer BPS' attempt at re-creating this slightly psychotic form of racing. Unfortunately, instead of requiring the gamer to make skillful use of the Gas and Brake buttons to initiate and recover from skids, BPS has opted to simplify the control to the point where just tapping the Drift button will cause the tires to break loose.

The game has several different modes. Scenario Mode pits you

against other drivers (and traffic) in races where you win money, prestige and upgrades to your car. It'd be fair to call the Scenario Mode tedious, since you'll have to replay the same races over and over in order to upgrade your car enough to move on in the game. There are also practice and Vs. Computer Modes, where traffic is eliminated, and your car can be upgraded as much as you like.

With only three tracks, a major downside when compared to a game like EA's Need For Speed, and no Two-player Mode or analog controller support, the game has little lasting value. Sound in THB is adequate, and music ranges from Ridge Racer-esque techno to conventional guitar-rock tunes. Graphics run at a decent frame rate (around 20 fps) with

fairly nice backgrounds and minimal pop-up.

It's interesting that Jaleco has chosen to bring this game stateside—it's not awful, but it doesn't seem to be a game that would appeal very much to the average U.S. gamer. Die-hard car buffs and those looking for something a little off the beaten path may want to take a look, though. IG

GRAPHICS: B-
+ Not much pop-up, and the tracks are fairly detailed.
- Still, not as impressive as other PS racing games.

SOUNDS: B-
+/- Music and sound effects are adequate, but little else.

GAMEPLAY: [B-]
+ Lots of options when tuning the car.
- The idea of a Drift button seems unrealistic to me.

LASTING POWER: C
+/- Scenario Mode is difficult, almost to a fault.
- No Two-player Mode and a lack of tracks hurt replayability.

OVERALL:
Intelligent Gamer
"AVERAGE" C+

Wipeout

Psygnosis ports their PlayStation racing megahit to the Saturn with surprising results

Publisher: Sega of America
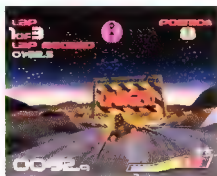
Format: Saturn

Release: 2nd Quarter '96

Saturn screenshots are pretty close to the PS version, but Wipeout in motion isn't as fluid or highly detailed on the Saturn as it is on the PlayStation. Control is a bit more forgiving on the Saturn

After over a half-year of exclusivity on the PlayStation, Wipeout—one of the holiday season's top 32-Bit games—has arrived for the Saturn. Since the first major PS port (Toshinden Remix) was a disappointment, many were doubtful that the Saturn version of Wipeout could compete with its PS predecessor. It's safe to say that these gamers are in for a surprise.

Developed by Tantalus for Psygnosis, the basic premise of Saturn Wipeout is virtually identical to the PS game: Teams of racers from around the globe gather to compete in a futuristic competition that takes place on multiple tracks over two racing circuits.

All that's missing from the Saturn version is a Two-player Mode, and while analog control is supported (through Sega's Arcade Racer), it doesn't seem to improve gameplay to the point that Namco's NeGcon did for the PS.

Wipeout sports nice graphics, and while they really don't compete with the smoother PS visuals, it'd be unwise to say that the graphics are bad, because that's not the case. The frame rate isn't up to par with the PS version, and the textures aren't quite as good, but the pop-up is virtually the same (not too bad), and any transparency effects that were in the PS version are now gone.

Musically, Wipeout offers everything from the PlayStation version, and the crisper sound includes three all-new tracks. Gameplay is where Wipeout really shines; rebounding off of walls no longer produces the frustrating "slow to a float" effect that was so dominant on the PlayStation. The flow of the crafts may seem a little less smooth on the Saturn, but overall the control is more satisfying.

Saturn's Wipeout is an above-average title that should please any Saturn owner that doesn't have access to the more polished PS version. **IG**

GRAPHICS: B-
- Textures are rough, and frame rate is not even close to the PS version.
+/- Compared to other Saturn racers, it's not THAT bad...

SOUNDS: A-
+ Three new tracks in addition to those in the PS Wipeout.
+ Tunes sound crisper than the PlayStation version.

GAMEPLAY: A
+ Control has been fine-tuned.

LASTING POWER: B-
+ Several tracks and two Racing Modes will keep you occupied for a while...
- But the lack of any Two-player Mode hurts the game's longevity.

OVERALL:

Intelligent Gamer
"RECOMMENDED" B

Tetris X

Tetris returns in sub-SNES fashion...for the PS?

Publisher: BPS Japan

Format: PlayStation

Release: Now (Japan)
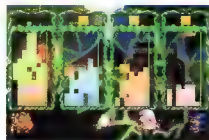
The Multiple Player Mode may feature characters from Tetris Battle Gaiden, but BPS forgot to bring along the gameplay.

When you have a well-established game franchise and it comes time to release an upgrade, you have three choices: Take the Street Fighter II route and release mostly incremental upgrades, take the MK2 route and change the aesthetics while preserving the core concepts or take the Tetris X route and disappoint the pants off of anyone familiar with your old products. Formerly in the upper two percent of developers as a result of their sterling treatment of such superb Japanese sequels as Super Tetris 2 Plus Bombliss and Tetris 3—neither released in America because of Nintendo's grip on the Tetris license here—Bullet Proof Software has taken a huge reputational nose dive with their latest addition to the series.

To say that Tetris X would fit on a cartridge is an understatement:

There's less here than there ever was in one of their SNES Tetris titles—a bare-bones Tetris Mode and a four-player simultaneous Tetris, and that's it. Bombliss, the incredibly fun and innovative BPS Tetris version which arrived (three years late and in scaled-down form) for the Game Boy as Tetris Blast, is nowhere to be found here, nor are Electrix or Tetris Battle Gaiden, other improved variants on the Tetris theme.

In order, the "thrills" are these. Four-player Battle Mode allows you to use cutesy Tetris Battle Gaiden characters to choose which opponent's board will receive your cleared-away blocks, backgrounds are photorealistic stills, and you even get to choose from three whole music tracks to play your old-fashioned Tetris. Whoopie. As 32-Bit code goes, Tetris X is not only disappointingly shallow and unimpressive, but it makes a bad impression on players familiar with BPS' previously superb 16-Bit puzzlers. A Saturn version of the game called Tetris S is also available, but we'd recommend waiting for something more than a pricey box of shovelware in a pricey box. **IG**

GRAPHICS: D
- No improvement over 16-Bit artwork, and for Tetris, that says a lot.

SOUNDS: C-
+/- Reasonable music, but too few tracks.

GAMEPLAY: D
- Many better Tetris games have been released, especially by BPS.

LASTING POWER: D
+/- Four-player Mode means that some people might want to play this for a bit, but classic Tetris has been done before and better.

OVERALL:

Intelligent Gamer
"POOR" D

► Say hello to one of Kitchen Stadium Tour's master chefs, a red-garbed fellow who appears at random intervals holding items of produce and looking nasty.

Kitchen
Stadium
(The Battle of Iron Chef)
Tour

## Televised cooking reaches new lows in Hamlet's light interactive movie

▲ Kitchen Stadium Tour's host smiles after chomping down on a delicious yellow pepper in the introductory video. Would you pay $60 for this?

This month sees the first installment of Kuso-Ge Gallery, our occasional column dedicated to exposing the truly bizarre in video gaming around the world. Other magazines generally only show the import titles that people in English-speaking countries would actually buy. IG, on the other hand, figured that it might just be interesting to show you games that are so bad that you'd probably never know to look for them. With that said, we present our first game: Hamlet's Kitchen Stadium Tour for the Saturn.

First, some background info. Kitchen Stadium Tour is a popular TV show in Japan—sort of a cross between a game show and a cooking show, pitting a different prominent chef from the Tokyo area against one of three tetsujin (iron men) chefs on the show.

The first thing you see as you boot the disc is the opening from the TV show; the camera pans through a rendered hallway, cutting briefly to a few shots of the show's flamboyant emcee (left). The camera proceeds forward through a door labeled Gourmet Academy, revealing the set of the show. Next comes something wholly unexpected: You see the announcer grab a yellow bell pepper and take a big old bite out of it, then turn to the camera as his mouth slowly curls into a knowing smile. Trust us, it gets weirder from here on out.

As the game starts, you are deposited just inside the doors of the Virtual Kitchen Stadium—a polygonal representation of the set of the show. From here, you can walk around the virtual set to activate various icons, some of which represent chefs who have appeared on the show, some representing food critics, some representing various staff people on the show, while others depict various cooking implements used, such as an ice-cream maker and an oven. Clicking on a visiting chef allows you to view background information on him or her, look at the dishes
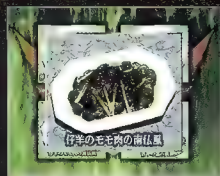
▲ When you're not looking at pictures of the delicious plates the chefs have prepared, you'll be watching truly bizarre video sequences (right) which include such random scenes as cooks in handcuffs holding yellow peppers, play-by-play cook-offs and people splashing mustard on huge pieces of barbecued meat.

prepared on that episode of the show and actually view an edited version of the TV episode itself.

A typical episode follows a fairly simple formula. First, some background information on the chef is given, including his/her specialty, where and whom he/she studied under, and what restaurants he/she has worked for in the past. The visiting chef then picks a tetsujin (each of whom is an accomplished cook in their own right, and has his/her own specialty), and the ingredient of the day rises out of a platform in the middle of the stage to dramatic fanfare. At this point, the emcee informs everyone what it is (in case you couldn't tell for yourself) in an overly enthusiastic manner that must be heard to be believed. The last photo on this page spotlights the cook in the act.

Next, the two chefs get to work, accompanied by play-by-play not unlike what you would hear on a televised sporting event. There is something truly surreal about hearing two announcers discussing the merits of sponge cake, or the use of cabbage as a wrapper for potstickers.

Finally, the critics get their hands on the food and give their opinions on the

dishes. They liked the homemade cheese one of the chefs made.

You're probably wondering, "how's the gameplay?" The easy answer to that question is, "what gameplay?" Kitchen Stadium Tour is technically not a game, as the vast majority of the time you will simply be walking from icon to icon, watching movie clips from the TV show. In fact, the only thing that could

You're probably wondering, "How's the gameplay?" The easy answer to that question: "What gameplay?"

even remotely be called a game is an icon that brings up a quiz based on the aforementioned video clips. It's hardly the pinnacle of gaming excitement, but still, not altogether unexpected.

Sadly, you don't even get recipes for what the chefs are making, a pity, since some of the stuff does look pretty good. You do get maps to the various restaurants that the visiting chefs work at—a great value for the money. IG

Q. I think we all have been vehemently enjoying the first-generation PlayStation offerings—I know I sure have. At first I questioned just how much better these games could really get then came Resident Evil. It has been a long time since I have been so enthralled with a video game. We are starting to see what the PlayStation is capable of, and this brings up an interesting question: Are the Nintendo 64 shots we have been seeing really that incredible? They were at first, but here comes a game such as Resident Evil and the playing field now changes. Are we going to be willing to spend outlandish prices (carts aren't cheap) for N64 games that are not the omnipotence they first appeared to be? The plot continues to thicken...

Brady Fiechter
Urbana, IL

A.   The difference between what you think of screenshots and what you think of moving video will be the major difference between the PlayStation and the Nintendo 64—Nintendo's goal with their new machine has been to have it produce polygonal artwork at high speeds with reasonable complexity minus jagged lines. If only Capcom would commit to developing Resident Evil 2 for the Nintendo 64 (which at the moment, they seem less than likely to do on an exclusive basis), the backgrounds could move in three dimensions as easily and smoothly as the game's characters.
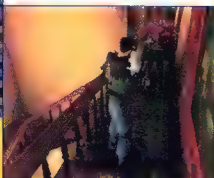
▲ Capcom's Resident Evil was one of the most anticipated games of 1996—could a Nintendo 64 sequel be in the works?

Q. I was wondering what ever happened to that new portable system that Nintendo was working on. Have they decided to develop it? Have you heard anything new about it? If so, let us know. I am sure there are others interested in this system.

Jared Zacharias
Escondido, CA.

A.   According to Nintendo, the machine will not be shown at E3, but there is unofficial confirmation from within the company that the machine does in fact exist on a proto-type level and is planned for a future debut that will not detract from the release of and publicity for the Nintendo 64. The company is also rumored to have been working on a smaller, cheaper version of the current black-and-white Game Boy—meaning that someone found a way to make a smaller and cheaper version physically possible—as a means to clear out the remaining stocks of old Game Boy cartridges.

Q. What is the deal on the hype surrounding the PlayStation? I have both a Saturn and a PlayStation and the Saturn has deeper games. I work at Software Etc. and the PS fans I've met can't tell the difference between VF2 and Tekken! I feel bad for Sega because they have a cooler product, but their target audience are brainwashed twits.

Jeremy Kellner
Strongsville, OH

A.   IG refuses to get involved in system advocacy, but we do advise readers to ask themselves where the pro-system hype they hate originally began. We strongly prefer to look at games on an individual basis rather than on one system's properties—both the PlayStation and the Saturn have good software, and each system's best games are worth playing.

▼ Tekken, along with Rave Racer and Air Combat 22, will be coming to PCs later this year thanks to NEC's PowerVR chipset.

Q. I hope I'm not robbing you guys of valuable time but I was wondering something, and I automatically thought of asking IG.
I am a big fan of arcade fighting games, and I'm seeing all these great games going to the Saturn and the PlayStation, but I want to know if and when will these companies convert these games (i.e., Tekken, X-Men, etc.) to the PC?

Patrick Climaco dos Santos
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

A.   Namco is releasing Tekken for PCs equipped with NEC and VideoLogic's PowerVR architecture (see IG's FUSION, issue 10), and as for X-Men, we checked with Capcom and were told that Acclaim holds the rights to release any future PC port of the title. At the moment, it does not appear that one is being readied, but as is always the case, that could change. We're personally anxious to see GTE's original PC fighting title FX Fighter 2.

Q. Before Square announced Final Fantasy VII for the PlayStation, there were Quicktime movies on Square's home page that were supposedly for the Nintendo 64's Bulky Drive. Now that Square is unsure if it is going to do anything for Nintendo, what becomes of the very impressive screens we saw on the 'net?

Zach Bolling
Platteville, WI

A.   At best, those movies will wind up as cinematic opening, ending or cut-scenes in a CD-based Final Fantasy title for the PlayStation, and we would be remiss if we neglected to mention that those were never actually graphics for the Nintendo 64 at all—they were just mocked-up demonstrations of what Square could do with 3-D polygonal characters using SGI workstations and their established artistic style. In a sign of the times, Square has closed down their Washington office, which was quite close to Nintendo's U.S. corporate headquarters, and is going to focus their U.S. development work in Los Angeles, America's "Games Central" for home software companies.

▲ What many players (and some press) thought was a true Nintendo 64 demo was actually just a brief (although playable) SGI mock-up used to demonstrate what Square programmers could do with next-gen hardware.

Q. I read in your magazine that SNK has signed an agreement to license games out to the PlayStation, and that the first couple of games will be available in spring of this year. Has SNK agreed to port its games over to the Saturn as well? Thank you.

Blake Mengotto
San Francisco, CA

A. Absolutely. Mentioned some months ago in *Intelligent Gamer* Online, SNK has decided to port three games to the Saturn, and the first title to be released by SNK for a 32-Bit system is their Japanese Saturn port of King of Fighters '95, reviewed in this issue. Samurai Shodown and Fatal Fury games are on the way for both the PS and Saturn, and a PS port of KoF '95 is forthcoming as well.

▲ KoF '95 is the first SNK port to appear on the Saturn, utilizing the new Dual-ROM system of both cartridge and CD-ROM

Q. Will the port on the bottom of the SNES ever be used?

Josh Frazer
Thief River Falls, MN

A. Mentioning that mysterious little port evokes memories of the SNES CD-ROM peripheral, but many people haven't heard about the Satellaview system released for the Japanese version of the Super NES. The device downloads games and information from a satellite link, and relatively obscure titles (such as 16-Bit versions of Super Mario USA and the classic Legend of Zelda) are popped onto the downloads list for people to enjoy. Don't expect to see the device outside of Japan, and other peripherals that might use the SNES' port are unlikely.

▼ After numerous delays, Capcom's DarkStalkers (reviewed in *IG'S FUSION* #9) is finally gearing to be released on the PS.

Q. Have you been able to find any information regarding the delay of DarkStalkers for the PlayStation? I have had this game "pre-purchased" since October of '95. Do you think I should get my money back and apply it to something more definite, or is this title indeed coming out?

Wayde R. Shanks
California, KY

A. The PlayStation version of DarkStalkers was just released in Japan under the name Vampire, and it will most likely be out in North America by the time you read this. Delays were caused by what Capcom unofficially regards as slipshod programming work from the game's developer, Psygnosis, and according to legend, the Psygnosis team had to be brought to Capcom's Osaka headquarters twice for special oversight because of the delays.

Q. I've purchased two PlayStations with problems. Using my second PS, X-COM crashes and King's Field freezes in mid-play.
I'm wondering if I should return this PlayStation too or are freeze-ups and glitches an everyday occurrence when a person owns a PlayStation? I hope that I'm just unlucky and ended up with two of the few glitched systems, because I still like my PlayStation.

Aaron Jukes
Whaletown, British Columbia, Canada

A. If a machine functions improperly, you don't want to own it. You might want to find a store where you can test your next PS machine before you bring it home.

Q. I have a few questions to ask and wonder if you could answer them.

1. I have heard that Virtua Fighter 3 will come with a CD and a cartridge. They said that the cartridge might hold additional frames per second and 3-D backgrounds. Will this happen?

2. What is the true release date for Panzer Dragoon II? I have heard multiple release dates.

3. When is Daytona Remix coming for the Sega Saturn?

Jeff Guenther
Santa Monica, CA

A. Question one: Sega may well decide to release Virtua Fighter 3 in some unique format, given that the Saturn hardware in its current state cannot begin to handle a visual translation that retains 75 percent of the arcade game's special features. Will a cartridge "hold additional frames per second and 3-D backgrounds?" Not in the way you might expect— unless there are special graphics chips inside of the cartridge, the Saturn won't magically gain extra graphic powers. Heed our advice on this. Sega's underlying strategy with home game ports seems to be simple—[a] when polygons are involved, the characters/vehicles/weapons are given the priority to look the most like their arcade equivalents, and the backgrounds are built from whatever is left; [b] programmers are supposed to capture the "feeling" and features of the arcade originals, if not the glitz and special effects associated with them. Here's one example: In VF2, you didn't need to actually interact with the background art, so it was flattened and the polygons were left to make the characters look as good as possible. Sega then de-emphasized the loss of background graphics and stressed that the gameplay was identical to the arcade original

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▼ Panzer Dragoon II (Zwei) was released on the April 16, a full month earlier than the anticipated release date.
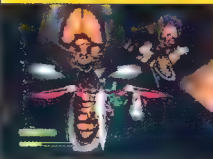
Given the need for 3-D fences and character armor damage effects—both requiring more programming work than was the case in Virtua Fighter 2, Fighting Vipers will most likely push the Saturn within inches of its maximum abilities. Virtua Fighter 3 is easily 10 times harder to duplicate, and sources familiar with Saturn programming tell us to expect either a port of VF3 that looks just about as impressive as Vipers on the Saturn does, or some sort of Saturn upgrade device.

Questions two and three: Panzer 2 was released in mid-April—almost a full month earlier than originally expected and Daytona Remix is slated for October.

▲ Sega fans are hoping Daytona Remix will be to Daytona USA (shown here) what Virtua Fighter 2 was to the original VF.

Send your questions to
IG Queries,

by e-mail at iglee@aol.com,
subject line: Communications

or
by mail at
1920 Highland Avenue, Suite 222
Lombard, IL 60148

GAMING public relations

By Christopher Drost

Rather than examining a technical issue this month, we chose to focus on something important but seldom examined within the video game industry. This issue, we peek behind the scenes of corporate "ghostbusters," the folks responsible for making sure that journalists bring you (or sometimes prevent you from having) a majority of the information you are reading in *Intelligent Gamer*, or for that matter, just about any media outlet.

What is Public Relations (PR)?

Public relations is, according to the Institute of Public Relations, "the planned and sustained effort to maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its public." Or, it's a job where your sole responsibility is to build an image and awareness about a product, event or company as well as educate the public by utilizing the information distribution capabilities of others, namely the media.

According to Perrin Kaplan, manager of corporate communications at Nintendo, "Effective public relations is meeting the business objectives of a company and the editorial objectives of the media." She adds, however, "Many times these two are in sync and only a little bit of fine tuning is required. But sometimes you have to play a bit of a mediator. So, it comes without saying that image is everything. Advertising, promotion and public relations can all be woven into one category. But PR is single-handedly the most important, uncontrolled art."

When it comes to the video game industry, public relations teams are responsible for "officially" letting us know about new corporate announcements, such as when new systems are to be launched, telling us when a "hot" new game is to be released, and even calling to conveniently remind us why one company is a thousand times better than another.

In fact, every time you read a video game (p)review, it has often been the responsibility of a PR individual to send a copy of the software title our way for review. Along with the game will be some kind of key information (a press release or fact sheet) for our reviewers to pore over while evaluating the software. It is hoped by PR firms that by making the information and game easily available for preview or review, the writer will be happy to play the game and will say as much to his or her readers—the result will hopefully be that you then go out and purchase the game.

But don't start thinking that you may score a free Saturn or PlayStation and hundreds of games just by becoming a writer for a small fanzine—you'll generally need to have a pretty large audience before PR firms will become

involved. According to Samantha Sackin, Sony's account supervisor at Fleishman Hillard International Communications, "You never know what will happen in this industry, yesterday's garage video game developer is tomorrow's success. Some of the most successful publications have started out of a garage. So every call I receive deserves some kind of respect. Yet, if someone calls me about getting a review PlayStation, I'll work with them and give them suggestions about renting or loaning a PlayStation until the first few issues are available." She added that "every publication affects a different audience, however. We worked with Sony to target a number of fanzines and alternative media, especially because those publications are the best way to reach our target audience."

For many different reasons, some companies cannot justify the cost of hiring a good PR team.

In-House vs. Contract PR

For many different reasons, some companies cannot justify the cost of hiring a good PR team,

especially when a large percentage of their budgets are devoted already to research and development and paying advertising costs. Instead, the company may hire one or two individuals to work in a marketing and PR capacity. Such is the case with software houses such as


▲ Even though the bumper sticker's glory years came and went sometime in the '70s, some companies still utilize them to advertise their games, mostly as a novelty. Who knows, maybe someone will really put it on his or her bumper

Acclaim, Capcom, Crystal Dynamics, Electronic Arts and Interplay—by utilizing an in-house team, corporations can keep their costs lower while effectively promoting a product.

A large corporation such as Nintendo, Sega, Sony or 3DO, however, will contract out the PR work to an independent communications firm. For example, Nintendo of America works with the worldwide PR giant Golin Harris to disseminate their news and information to the masses. (Things are a little different in Canada, where

▶ Perrin Kaplan, Manager of Corporate Communications for Nintendo, pictured with a colorful backdrop of Nintendo products, believes one aspect of Public Relations work is to keep the cycles of game companies in sync with game enthusiasts' magazines. Keeping both parties happy is always the main objective. When things are not in sync, the mediating skills of the Public Relations person are tested. Kaplan also believes while advertising, promotion and Public Relations can sit in one category, Public Relations is the most import uncontrolled art.
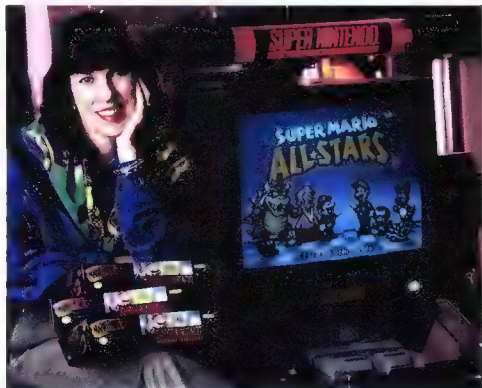
the company retains the services of GCI Communications, a division of Grey Advertising.) In similar scope, Sega works exclusively with the California-based offices of Manning, Selvage and Lee for all of its U.S. communications, while Sega of Canada relies on Temple Scott Associates of Toronto Sony Computer Entertainment contracts all of their work for the U.S. and Canada to the aforementioned PR giant, Fleishman-Hillard. Other firms who prefer to use outside companies include Playmates and Williams, and many firms retain both in-house PR (for gaming enthusiast media) and PR agency representatives (for the media at large) as well.

Some of the greatest benefits of hiring an external PR firm are the additional person-to-person experience, reputation and manpower that seasoned PR professionals can bring to the table. So says Sackin, who told *Intelligent Gamer* that her client went looking for an outside firm as an extension to their in-house marketing and internal PR staff. "It's a unique extension, actually," she says adding that "when you work in-house, you become too close to a project. You need an outside agency who can support new and creative ideas and can tap large resources."

Sackin hastened to add that the people working on the Sony account "play the games in

order to become knowledgeable about the products. I don't know if all agencies make it a priority to fully understand what they are talking about though!"

So How Does PR Work ?

Like any magazine, our readership is very important to a Public Relations firm. Because we know that a certain number of people read this magazine every month, getting a product into our magazine is worth quite a bit to a PR team—at the very least, a sizeable number to help promote a new product. Sending a news release to 10 video game magazines can potentially bring a product's potential

audience from a hundred thousand to a couple of million readers.

For example, fictitious company Nanuuka Inc. is set to release a brand-new 28-Bit video game system complete with immersive VR, a built-in cable-ready Web browser, four laser-optic joysticks, a super speedy CD-ROM drive and by some fluke, can cure the common cold...all for less than $200.

Nanuuka figures it should hire an external public relations team to alert key members of the media to get the word out about this revolutionary machine. The PR folks would immediately establish how much it would cost to make such an announcement. The client, Nanuuka, approves the budget and the PR team goes away to build a massive media list, based on the coverage this announcement should receive.

The PR team may start by approaching key video game trade journalists, as well as medical

Trade shows like this month's E³ expo are like a giant public relations hoe-down.

digests, daily newspapers, television and radio stations to "leak" the information out. Several press releases would then be drafted, redrafted and then written in such a way to detail all the merits of this machine. After e-mailing, faxing and mailing out the information, many calls (and follow-up calls) will be made to various media organizations to ensure the story is run. Suddenly, the story is in every magazine, newspaper and digest and is being blabbed about on the radio and on the TV. The PR company will be deluged with phone calls to interview the makers of this mysterious machine and pretty soon, more than 1 billion people have heard about the new device...and everyone is clammering to get their hands on it. The company makes a mint and hardly a cent in advertising dollars has been spent—coverage in magazines without advertising is free. Nintendo's Perrin Kaplan, agrees. "PR has a lot to do with word of mouth," adding that "it's a great, great art."

Now, of course, this is only a PR person's dream, and after all, a well-known expression in public relation circles is "advertising you pay for it, and in PR—you pray for it."

The media is not the only means of raising public awareness Appropriate publicity gimmicks may even include imprinted balloons, silly knickknacks, promotional giveaways or something as extreme as

▲ More economical PR kits include this mock-up editors diary promoting the Sega game Panzer Dragoon II. The diary instructs young warriors on battle techniques along with pertinent game tips to help players win.

skywriting or having S-E-G-A emblazoned on a racing car. Attendees of last year's E³ trade show in Los Angeles may remember giant billboards erected all over the downtown core, promoting everything from hotels to video game machines. In fact, Sony was responsible for making sure just about every bus and bus shelter in the downtown area was covered in PlayStation propaganda.

Trade shows like this year's E³ expo are like a giant public relations hoe-down. Just about every company who has anything to do with video games (and their respective PR teams) converge on the Los Angeles convention center for a few days, all trying to convince journalists why a particular product deserves coverage and why the competition doesn't. Over those few short days, public relations officials sit with journalists and review corporate forecasts, software releases and potential/upcoming story opportunities.

▲ Often companies cannot release early beta games to the media due to security reasons. The alternative is a video tape containing scenes of the game. From the tape, game magazines can capture "screen grabs" for publication.

How to become a PR Person

Required is either a PR degree or plenty of media experience, as well as a solid amount of literacy in the languages you'll be writing in. You must also have knowledge and experience of the field you're willing to get into—in fact, just about every PR individual queried for this story told us the exact same thing

"You can learn PR but it's harder to learn an industry!" After all, it's not worth the time or effort to work for a PR firm that specializes in medical technologies or agriculture when all you understand is video games and computers.

Other qualities that make a successful PR person, according to just about anyone queried, include tactfulness, energy, the ability to adapt, being personable, open-minded and the mindset to stay dedicated and resourceful. **IG**

(Trade) Show Business

Inside the Electronic Entertainment Expo

Gamers rarely think about trade shows. much less attend them. Such meetings are remote from the primal play-experience. Yet these shows frequently influence the games. What happens behind the closed doors of the big shows shape what we play, sometimes for years to come.

Many professional gaming magazines know how to present them. The usual trade show report is one part barely rewritten press releases and one part whining about all the hard work. Writers sometimes get too caught up in the process of covering hundreds of booths and suites to see the big picture. I'll save my sympathy for the homeless and victims of incurable diseases.

Interactive electronic entertainment infiltrated the Consumer Electronics Shows (CES) the late 1970s. Video game companies, most s ing self-contained hand-helds, debuted at CES in the late 1970s. The Atari 2600 greatly expanded the games section because so many companies made cartridges to support it.

By the early 1980s, co_____ publishers grew wea___ substantial cost of ___ it on the exhibit f___

CES had spli___ May and Las V___ ny first in 19___ led more____ nt. inte_____ d q_____ ____ games ___ l. From that ___tainment main-___ ven during the

___ on is staggering. A ___3 million tag, including ___ n a small exhibit is a six-

___ Sega have taken huge areas ___ m to third-party supporters. It's a ___ burden for the umbrella com-___tendo City and Segaville of the early 1990s are noticeably smaller at current shows.

In the last few years, many companies stopped buying booths. They either rent a meeting room in the back of the hall or open a corporate suite at of the host major hotels.

Why spend all this money? Originally, the main purpose was to meet buyers for electronics and discount retail chains. Distribution and marketing channels weren't well-established, so pioneers like Activision and Sierra On-Line built retailer networks one customer at a time.

Industry events still help start-up and small operators in this fashion, but other factors now outweigh buyer contact. Trade shows give the business a chance to assess itself, compare notes and hunt for future directions. The Winter CES and the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E³) are high-concept raves where publishers trial-balloon ideas for the next holiday season. And if those wonderful innovations don't excite the buyers, they're unceremoniously buried in a back room forever.

The shows are a public relations bonanza. They give manufacturers of hot products a way to reach both the mass market and the hardcore.

Recruiting is now a significant activity, too. This year's E³ is the biggest job fair in industry history. Weak cartridge sales and a soft CD-ROM infotainment market have dumped thousands of product, marketing and sales people into the unemployment line. Many hope to find new employment with expansion-minded companies that trawl the event for personnel.

Independent developers come to E³ with a dream. They have a product or a demo. They tour the publishers looking for one with faith ___ a signing bonus check that won't bounce.

Today's top show is E³ rather than the one dominant CES. The Summer CES is gone. They hope to mount a licensed product ___ int venture with Comdex, which spotlights computer hardware, peripherals, business software and utilities.

The Winter CES continues, but it's clearly secondary to E³. It's too soon for Christmas buying, and dissatisfaction over second-class treatment soured video game manufacturers several years back. Computer software companies still go to Vegas, but the video game manufacturers have left for the entertainment-only event.

Interactive electronic entertainment didn't find its needed new direction at the Winter CES in January. Check back next issue to find out if they find it at E³.

—Arnie Katz

NILOC'S CELEBRITY CRAPS

NILOC'S CELEBRITY CRAPS

Niloc's Celebrity Craps is the first 3-D rendered, fully interactive multimedia celebrity craps game, and if you buy one rendered 3-D, fully interactive craps game this year, make it Niloc.

**Seth Mendelsohn**
Boss Game Studios

Okay, the gig's up: Yes, Niloc the Bananaman is an actual character designed by Boss Game Studios, but there isn't a celebrity craps game in development—as a matter of fact, plans for any game starring the walking chiquita are on hold. For several months now, a handful of lucky journalists and industry types have been wearing Boss Game's "Adventureland" T-shirts, which allegedly were early promotional items for the company's top-secret title Adventureland (see *IG's FUSION*, issue eight). As we've known for some time, the name Adventureland was a ruse to diffuse the numerous inquiries Boss has received on what they've been working on. "Whenever you start a new company," explains Seth Mendelsohn, Boss Game's creative director, "people always ask you what you're doing. A game about a banana seemed so ludicrous, that if people asked you what you were doing, you'd tell them and they'd laugh about it—it was kind of like changing the subject. The name Adventureland, too—such a generic name—it means absolutely nothing...we actually submitted that name to Sony and Sega for approval."

As it turned out, Boss was really working on Spider (previewed this issue, pgs. 48-49), a game with a title that would quite clearly give away the content immediately. "We didn't want to be like Earthworm Jim," continued Mendelsohn, "one of those games where you hear about it for months and months and months; we wanted to keep the game a secret so that when people came to E³ and saw it for the first time, they'd be blown away and surprised, like what we felt when we saw DKC for the first time." At the same time, everybody loves Niloc. "He kind of became our mascot," laughs Mendelsohn, counting the number of people who have been asking for the sparse T-shirts. Boss may put the character on a poster in one of Spider's levels or include him somewhere in the game—polygonal mockups of Niloc already exist. There's a rumor that "Nodrog the Viking Bunny" T-shirts—given to members of Boss Game's Kill Team staff—are still available... **IG**
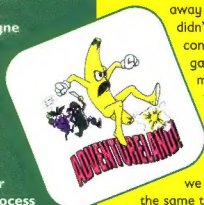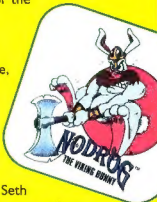
Few celebrity craps games can claim to carry the endorsements of notable celebrities such as Carol "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" Channing and Wayne "Dankeschon" Newton, and even fewer can boast of playing host to Boss Game Studios' killer mascot, Niloc the Bananaman. As a matter of fact, ever since the design process ended for Boss Game's full-motion video fishing RPG (working title: Sinbad's 12-Inch Champion), development at Boss has shifted entirely toward pumping up Niloc's Celebrity Craps for an E³ debut.

Boss V.P. Colin Gordon, profiled in *IG's Fusion* issue 8, served as the model for one of Niloc and Nodrog's distinguishing characteristics. Can you spot the similarity?

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